POSSESSION

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

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By MAZO DE LA ROCHE

Author of "Delight"

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TO

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

CONTENTS

PART I

Chapter		Page
I.	The Haligonian	3
II.	May Morning at Grimstone	15
III.	Lift Up Your Hearts	24
IV.	Sale at Durras—Gretta van Lowe	37
V.	Dark Water Lilies	46
VI.	Cherries at Dawn	54
VII.	The Folly of Solomon	65
VIII.	July Night at Grimstone	70
IX.	Solomon in His Glory	76
X.	Christmas at Grimstone	89
XI.	The Rill in the Wood	108
XII.	The Wind Out of Windmill's Sails	116

PART II

I.	An Earring upon the Ear of the Guilty	129
II.	Hubbub at Grimstone	139
III.	"For such persons—"	152
IV.	Dolce Domum	167
V.	Edmund	180
VI.	Sweet Apples on a Rustic Seat	187
VII.	Sale at Durras—Darby	198
VIII.	Things That He Learned	211
IX.	Jammery	229
X.	Pegleg	240
XI.	Love among the Hummocks	254
XII.	Buckskin Strikes His Tent	264

PART I

PART I

CHAPTER I

The Haligonian

1.

On an evening in early May, a young man was walking sharply along the country road that passed through the fishing-village of Mistwell, and, following the shore of one of those inland seas, oddly called great lakes, led to the town of Brancepeth, seven miles away.

The young man was just above medium height and just under thirty, and he walked with a resolute and eager step that spoke of some elation of spirit. As the deep ruts of the road were half-frozen he kept to the side, where a narrow path was beaten, looking about him with the interest of one who sees his future surroundings for the first time. His wide-open, greenish-blue eyes rested with pleasurable curiosity, first on the budding orchards to his right, and then on the level expanse of the lake, flushed pink by the reflection of the western sky, to his left.

His eyes were not only wide open, as though they looked life eagerly in the face, expecting more than most men: but they had a free, fearless, careless look, that, combined with his closely cropped fair hair, and small, tawny mustache, made him appear even younger than he was. His strong limbs denoted vigour and his full, round chin and rather wide nostrils indicated some rashness and dominance of character.

He stopped to snuff the crisp air from the lake and to watch a flock of gulls circling in pursuit of their evening meal.

He now saw that he was not alone, for another pedestrian had appeared around a bend of the road behind him. He watched the approach of the newcomer with the same look of pleasant curiosity that he had given to the landscape. As he came up beside him, he said:

"Can you tell me whether I am near a place named Grimstone?"

He spoke in the full, agreeable tones of a Nova Scotian; the other replied with a slight North of Ireland accent:

"You are. It's not above half a mile from here. I'm going past the gate myself, and, if you like, I'll bear you company."

They walked along together; the Nova Scotian keeping to the narrow path, while his companion strode doggedly over the frozen ruts. He was a slender, wiry man, with thin, ruddy cheeks and hard, light-blue eyes. His coat-collar was turned up against the frosty air, and he swung a carved walking-stick, as though he had a fierce pleasure in movement.

"I take it that you're young Mr. Vale, himself," he said.

The young man nodded, smiling with a little embarrassment.

"It's queer they didn't come to meet ye."

"They are not expecting me till tomorrow. I found I could get away a day earlier, and—well, I suppose I was in a hurry to see the place."

"Naturally. It's a fine place, but not kept up as it should be. But perhaps you've visited it before?"

"No. I have never been west of Quebec till now."

"Perhaps you've never taken much interest in farming, eh?" His tone was inquisitive.

"Very little. I'm an architect. But I like the country. Riding, fishing. That sort of thing."

"Well, you'll find life different here. Of course, Grimstone is a small place, just two hundred acres; it's not a great charge. Now, we have eight hundred acres, and the finest herd of Holsteins in the Province. You must come to see us, Mr. Vale, and I'll show you about. I manage the farm lands for Mr. Jerrold, the owner. My name is Hobbs." He gave the information about himself with a certain swagger. Obviously, he was a man to be reckoned with.

While he discoursed with fluency of prize bulls, butter-making contests, and fattening steers, young Mr. Vale, half wishing he were alone again—this man seemed to take the glamour from his adventure—peered into the now deepening dusk for the first signs of his new habitation.

He had been told at the station that a little graveyard lay just east of Grimstone, and now the road, sweeping sharply to the very edge of the steep shore, almost circled a grove of ragged pines, among which he caught the pale glimmer of gravestones. The gentle swish of the water seemed at his very feet. A white wooden house appeared like someone waiting at the roadside. Hobbs was saying:

"This is where Chard lives. You'll not find him much of a neighbour. Now I'll just tell you what he's like. Not long ago he hired some men from Mistwell to help him dig drains. Very well; when the end of the week came he paid the men, all but old Peek. And he says to him—'Peek, you're so old and feeble that you can't do as much as the others, so you'll come back to work two days more before I give ye a week's wage.' And the poor old devil had to. So now I've introduced Chard, the Superintendent of the Sunday-school, and a damned good farmer. But

that's what I call sharp and hard, Mr. Vale, and yet I'm called hard sometimes by the thirty-odd men under me. Now here's your gate, and good night to you. Don't forget to come over and see our herd."

Touching his cap he hurried down a sudden steep that fell from the gates of Grimstone, ending in a little bridge that spanned an unseen stream whose gushing murmur proclaimed it swollen with the spring rains.

2.

Derek Vale stood still. He did not want to open the gate till Hobbs was out of sight. Then—"My gate," he thought, and laid his hand on the cold iron almost caressingly. The dark bulk of a low, broad, stone house rose before him, surrounded by the massive trunks of trees whose lowest branches were higher than its chimneys. The front of the house was in darkness, but he could see a light in one of the back rooms. He determined to go to the window where the light was and get a glimpse of the occupants of the house, so that he might have the advantage of having seen them unobserved.

The light was cast by an oil lamp on the kitchen table. Derek drew near the window with caution. He felt beneath his feet the stone of a flagged yard. A noise of stamping and singing came from within. He was astonished and amused by what he saw.

In the circle of ruddy light a girl was dancing a sort of breakdown, supplying the music for her performance with her own lusty, clear voice. She seemed charged with rough vigour, snapping her fingers and stamping her feet in almost frenzied rhythm. Her full breasts bounced, her strong legs leaped against her long, heavy skirt; the lamp light sparkled on the thick spectacles she wore. Around her were grouped four men and an old woman. "She must be

Mrs. Machin," thought Derek, "the housekeeper . . . the men, farm labourers, of course."

He was fascinated by the dancing of the girl. Only when she had dropped panting into a chair could he give more than a glance to the men. Two were seated at the table facing each other. They had been playing at dominoes and they now returned to the game, their faces still fixed in the grin with which they had watched the dance. One was a red-cheeked youth with a black bullet head, beady eyes, and a sly smile. His opponent had a narrow head, a fair, reckless face, and the look of a sailor rather than a farm labourer. Talking and laughing with the girl, the third man showed through his open collar a full brown throat and chest; he had an honest, stubborn face. The fourth had been sitting in the shadow, but he now drew a match across a stove-lid and held it to a cigarette, the flash illuminating for a moment his prominent, well cut cheek bones, bright eyes, and curly brown hair. He rose, stretched himself, and came towards the window. Derek hastily turned away, and, finding himself facing the door, he gave a sharp, yet nervous rap.

3.

The man with the cigarette opened the door. A collie dog at his side barked noisily.

"I should like to see Mrs. Machin," said Derek.

The old woman instantly appeared, pushing aside the dog and man, and presenting a peremptory front to Vale.

"You are the housekeeper, aren't you?" he said.

She looked at him shrewdly. "My goodness, don't tell me you are Mr. Vale! We didn't expect you till tomorrow. Of course, it don't matter to me. But one of these boys should ha' met you."

"I've enjoyed the walk," said Derek. "Shall I come in at this door?"

"Well, I expect you can come in at any door you please. It's your house. But if I was you, I'd go round and come in at the front. It'd be more seemly for the master."

Derek laughed. "I think I shall come this way if you don't mind. It looks rather more cheerful."

The young men had got to their feet, but the girl, evidently overcome by shyness, sat with her face hidden in the curve of her arm, supported by the back of her chair.

Mrs. Machin put the dog outside and shut the door sharply. She said:

"Now you are in the kitchen, Mr. Vale, I may as well name over these idle rascals to you. The two playing dominoes are Bob Gunn and John Newbigging. Bob used to be in the Chube Wur-rks in Glesca, he says. He means he used to be in the Tube Works in Glasgow." The bullet-headed youth grinned. "John Newbigging has been all over creation and he has an old mother in Dundee he never writes to. Perhaps you'll be able to stop him and Bob quarrelling as to which is the worst city, Glesca or Auld Reekie. I can't." Both men burst into embarrassed laughs, and Newbigging said, "It's no fair, Mrs. Machin, to be tryin' to prejudice Mr. Vale against us frae the start."

"This one," proceeded Mrs. Machin, indicating the honest-faced fellow, who still kept near the girl, "is Hugh McKay. He's a Galloway shepherd, and he'll talk about sheep to you all day long if you'll let him." McKay came forward with dignity and held out his hand.

"Mrs. Machin 'd be givin' us all a character," he said.

"Well, I'm prepared to do a good deal of talking about sheep," said Derek, shaking the proffered brown hand, and liking McKay at once.

"Phoebe, get up out of that chair and speak to Mr. Vale." But the girl, though she rose, uncovering her comely, red face, would not speak. She stared, teetering on her feet, and holding to McKay's coat sleeve.

"Are you Scotch, too?" asked Derek.

"No, she comes from Kent. She used to work in the hop-fields," replied McKay. "That's where she learned to dance."

"To hop, as it were," said Derek. The joke brought a roar of laughter from the men.

"This is Mr. Windmill," interrupted Mrs. Machin. He threw away his cigarette and came forward. "He's out here to study farming. But he just works and lives like the rest of us. Except he wears gloves to plough."

Windmill flushed but smiled good-humouredly. "The horses don't seem to mind me having gloves on."

"No, but Mike minded you having boots on when you kicked him the other day."

"Didn't I say she'd be givin' us all characters?" said McKay.

Mrs. Machin had lighted a tall, brass lamp; picking it up, she said: "Well, you've had a look at us, Mr. Vale, and if you'll come to the dining room now, I'll lay you a bit of supper." As she preceded Derek with the lamp, she called back, "Wood and water, boys."

She was a repellent old woman, he thought, with her yellow face, black, oily hair, eyes the colour of an oyster, and stiff, white apron. And she had hurried him out of the kitchen, his own kitchen, in a very domineering fashion. Well, since she seemed so capable, and so used to ordering the men about, it would relieve him of the necessity of taking the reins into his unaccustomed hands at once.

The dining room was a low-ceilinged room wainscoted in

white and papered in dark green. The furniture was black oak, and two deep, built-in cupboards filled with blue china lent a comfortable old-world air. There were two large steel engravings on either side of the chimney piece: Wellington and Blucher after Waterloo, and The Trial of William, Lord Russell. The large fireplace had been papered over. Tapping it with his knuckles, he thought, "I'll have that opened up," but, as Mrs. Machin looked at him sharply, he picked up a china greyhound from the mantel and examined it. His greyhound . . . . but it was ridiculous.

Mrs. Machin set him down to cold beef, bread and butter, bramble jam, and tea.

"Home-made bread?" he asked, with his mouth full.

"No, indeed. We've plenty to do without bread-making and the baker three times a week from Mistwell. Ain't it good?"

"Delicious," he replied, abashed.

Mrs. Machin had closed the door between the dining room and kitchen and established herself in a straight-backed chair against the wall. She said:

"I should know you for a Vale anywhere. I s'pose that's why your uncle took to you."

"It was a great surprise. It scarcely seemed fair to my brother."

"Fair! What's unfair about it? Couldn't he leave his property where he liked?" She stroked her apron with her large-knuckled hands. "Well I remember when he went away to Halifax ten years ago to choose which one he would make his heir. When he came back he said to me—'I've made my choice, Mrs. Machin. His name's Derek. The other one is no Vale,' says he. He was terrible proud of

this place. I s'pose you know that your great-grandfather built it above a hundred years ago."

"My uncle talked to me a great deal when he was in Halifax. He spoke of you too."

"He might well speak of me. I've served his family faithful for—let's see—fifty-four years this month. And the last two years, I've run the place myself, you might say. Not bad for a woman of seventy-two, eh?"

"Wonderful."

"And now I want to know if you're going to keep me on. It don't matter a bit to me because I've got a sister in Mistwell that wants me to live with her, and I haven't slaved all these years and saved nothing you may depend on it."

For all her air of independence Derek could see that she was fiercely eager to stay. He did not want her, yet he was afraid to be left alone in charge of the four men and the girl. He might make himself ridiculous. He said:

"In his will my uncle recommended you. Of course I shall want you to stay on."

"Well, I'm glad that's settled. Not that it matters to me, though I do look on Grimstone as my home, having lived here ever since my father was drowned."

"In the lake here?"

"Why not? There's plenty of room, ain't there? It gets all the Mistwell fishermen sooner or later. It didn't get pa till he'd fathered six of us, so that wasn't so bad. But it laid low and got two out of the six. Fools, to be fishermen!"

4.

When she was gone and the door closed behind her, Derek stretched his legs and felt for his pipe. He lay back in his armchair staring at the ceiling darkened by the soot from a

stove-pipe that crossed it from end to end. "Stove-pipe's got to go," he muttered, between puffs. "Just a big open fireplace—and logs." He got up and began restlessly to pace the room. He examined Wellington and Blucher again, shaking hands so cordially, the dead and dying tumbled plentifully about their horses' hoofs.

He next observed a sampler, The Lord's Prayer, worked by Agnes Vale, aged nine years, in the year of our Lord, Eighteen Hundred and Thirty-six. Seventy-five years ago, Cousin Agnes in England must be named for her . . . . he thought of cousin Agnes, whom he had never seen. He thought of Edmund, his only near relation. How Edmund would laugh if he could see him now! He felt that Edmund would have been better able to cope with Mrs. Machin. He wished that she and the others would go to bed so that he might adventure further. No doubt they were talking him over in the kitchen. Now he heard a shuffling of feet and the click of a bolt. He returned quickly to his chair and crossed his legs.

The door behind him opened. It was the women. Mrs. Machin gave the impression of driving Phoebe before her. The girl's hand was over her mouth, as though at any moment she might explode with laughter. Mrs. Machin gave a curt good night, and they disappeared into the dark passage. Soon the three Scotchmen went through in Indian file. They were in their stockinged feet, and McKay carried a short end of candle. They said, "Good nicht, sir," in a friendly chorus, but kept their eyes shyly averted. Derek waited impatiently for the Englishman, Windmill. It was quite half an hour before he followed the others. He wore slippers and carried a small lamp. He hesitated, smiled pleasantly, and said:

"There is a step down into the hallway, Mr. Vale. I thought I should warn you."

"Oh, thanks," said Derek.

He was alone.

A clock in the hall struck ten with harsh, penetrating tones.

The dog was snuffling at the crack under the door, evidently disturbed by the strange presence.

Derek went to a window and looked out. No moon; he had never seen such utter darkness. It was as though Grimstone had swallowed him, and a tangible body was reared between him and the world he had known. He turned back to the room and picked up the lamp. Mrs. Machin had told him that she had prepared two bedrooms for him—one downstairs—one above. (It didn't make no difference to her which he took.) Detestable old woman. Why had she not warned him of the step? Even knowing of it he almost stumbled. The lamplight showed him a severe hall with five closed doors, and a hatstand, on either side of which a deer's head peered at him with startled brown eyes. The tall clock stood under the stairway beside a narrow door, which, when he opened it disclosed only a closet hung with hats and coats, and a shelf of old magazines and ledgers. His uncle's clothes. He closed the door feeling a little rebuffed for his curiosity, and opened a door opposite. Here was the parlour: a long, narrow room with two doors opening on the hall, and a row of low windows, hung with straight green curtains. There were many walnut chairs and tables, the latter ornamented with brass-bound books, and glass candelabra with hanging prisms. A group in marble stood on the closed piano; a few oil-paintings hung against the pale walls. A room full of memories; not to be taken possession of lightly, rather repelling intrusion.

Across the hall he found a bedroom whose tall four-poster and deep leather chair pleased him at once. The old Eng-

lish sporting prints on the walls were nice, too. He was tired but he would not go to bed till he had seen the upstairs.

So he ascended the uncarpeted steps, the lamp at a precarious angle. He explored three bedrooms and a dingy little study, and peered down a narrow passage that led to the rooms occupied by the help.

As he undressed he wondered how they were disposed: probably the robust girl and the dry old woman together; Windmill alone; the three Scots sleeping like logs. He found his bed, when he plunged into it, amazingly soft and enveloping. He had never slept on feathers before. As he drew the quilt to his chin he gave an amused little chuckle. It seemed to him that he had taken command of a storm-worn old ship and was outward bound on an unknown sea. Well, he had a hardy old pilot in Mrs. Machin . . . and, thinking of her, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER II

May Morning at Grimstone

1.

It was a rippling, throaty noise, sweet and oft-repeated; scarcely enough to rouse one from deep slumber. But the vibrant, clanging note which followed, effectually wakened him. The early sunlight was flooding the room, and, beyond the open window, the lake stretched, a vast shield of radiant blue and gold. He sat up in bed, half bewildered, staring. A spreading bush of bleeding-heart grew before the low window. It was in full bloom, its long sprays of deep, pink hearts hanging, like jewels, against the green of the wet lawn. A slow procession now passed: seven bronze turkey hens, with necks outstretched went by in single file, and a little space behind them, every feather bright with a metallic sheen, his wattles, blue and scarlet, dangling beneath his open beak, the gobbler. Close by his side, with light steps, a snow-white turkey-hen walked delicately.

Derek could have shouted, the picture was so beautiful, so arranged, as for a stage effect. He thought of it the while he dressed, and dashed his face with icy water from the ewer.

The table was set for him in the dining room. The sound of turning machinery and a loud voice singing came from the kitchen. Mrs. Machin appeared. In the daylight her face looked yellower, her eyes more like oysters, and her apron more snowy than ever. She twisted her pale lips into a smile.

"Good morning. Will ye take porridge?"

"Please. And bacon and eggs, Mrs. Machin."

"You don't want them all at once, do ye?" she answered sharply.

"Oh, no," he said, feeling rebuffed. He took his place at the table, and hoped she noticed his displeased silence while she served him. But he could not remain displeased; the food was good, his appetite sharp; he smiled at her like a boy, in spite of himself.

"What's the excitement in the kitchen?" he asked.

"Oh, that's Phoebe separatin'. She always hollers when she does it. I'll tell her to stop."

But the machine was stopping with a slow, whining rasp. Mrs. Machin went out. Silence prevailed in the kitchen. He heard Phoebe go singing towards the barn.

2.

A door opened from the dining room on the flagged yard. He stood there in the sunshine looking over his new possessions. A wide, rolling field stretched before him to the bank of the stream, and rose beyond it in a high, level meadow, fringed with warped trees whose stems and limbs were bent in a single direction, away from the gently rippling lake, cowered in their old age from the mutable master who had so cruelly lashed them when they were but striplings.

But the stately group of trees about the house, whose massive trunks supported such a fragile foliage that it scarcely threw a shade, seemed never to have been fretted, but towered in upright dignity above the solid walls. No shrubs or hedges softened the stern aspect of the place. Grimstone fronted an unbroken view of cliff, and lake, and sky. Yet all was not harshness, for a cherry orchard, in

full bloom, crowded to the very kitchen doors, the moist ground beneath the trees already white with the tender petals that fell before the rough May wind. Behind the cherry orchard rose the ordered ranks of the apple orchard barely in bud, excepting a few crab-apple trees in pink flower, that filled the air with their lovely scent. West and south of the orchards were the plantations of small fruits, and, beyond them, fields and pastures, and a dark pine wood.

Derek could see a group of figures kneeling among the rows of an immense strawberry bed, over which the collie was scampering, barking in scatter-brain fashion at the circling gulls. He saw Newbigging and Gunn and three barelegged village boys placing little plants in a shallow trench. Mrs. Machin stood over them, directing the "puddling" of the roots in a basin of earth and water, and the position of them in the trench.

"We're settin' out some fresh strawberry plants," she explained. "Them's Mistwell lads helping us, and they'd do naught but scuffle if I didn't watch them."

"Where are the others?"

"Hugh McKay is plowing, and Windmill has gone back to look for the horses. Phoebe's feedin' the calves."

"What buildings are those on up the road?"

"Mr. Jerrold's stables, and Hobbs's house. You can't see Jerrold's house from here. Those are his orchards beyond the lane, and his house is hid by them. It stands far from the road, with its back against a big wood."

"I met the overseer, Hobbs, last night."

"He's a sharp 'un. But I don't see how Mr. Jerrold could get on without him. As it is, they can't raise fodder enough off that great place to feed their own creatures, but have to come buyin' hay off us."

Newbigging looked up from where he knelt.

"The men say that so long as they keep the horses and traps in fine order, Mr. Jerrold don't care a tinker's dam about anything else."

"Ay," said Gunn, sitting on his heels, "and Miss Jerrold has the gairdeners off their work half the time, plantin' daffydils in the woods, the way they grow wild in Scotland."

"The Jerrold's are gentry," said Mrs. Machin, "and you can't expect no better of them."

"I don't blame them," said Newbigging. "I like a place to look bonny, mysel'. Don't you call that a fine view over the sea, Mr. Vale?" He made a broad gesture of his hand that held a strawberry plant.

"They all talk about the sea," interrupted Mrs. Machin, "and they will have it there's a tide. I don't pay no heed to views or tides. I've never had no time for it."

"Jock!" shouted Gunn to the collie, "If ye'll no quit chasin' they seagulls, I'll sort ye."

The dog came bounding across the beds; the gulls rose, whimpering; two steamers, passing, saluted each other hoarsely. It was a jolly thing to be standing in the breeze on one's own land.

"Well, I'm off exploring," said Derek.

"Take a look at Chard's place. There's a farm in order. He's what I call a good man. He gets something out of every inch of his land."

"And gives no heed to bonny views," added Newbigging, slyly. Gunn and he chuckled and giggled, glad of any diversion from work.

3.

In two hours Derek had inspected his apple, cherry, plum, and pear trees; his thimbleberry, raspberry, and blackberry canes; leaned over the pig-sty and held friendly

converse with a Yorkshire sow which was suckling eleven young; and searched for eggs in the poultry house. He had inspected the contents of the carriage-house; looked wisely at the small remainder of last year's crops; crossed the stepping-stones of the stream, and tried to make friends with the velvet-coated, dark-eyed Jersey herd, grazing in the meadow next the shore.

Now he was loitering up the lane, boundary between Grimstone and Durras, as the Jerrolds' place was named. White and red wood lilies, like children at play, peeped among the undergrowth along the fence; in every sheltered corner clumps of violets grew in moist seclusion.

He wished again that Edmund could see him. Edmund had been rather facetious about the farm. He had counselled Derek to rent or sell it. But Derek, though he liked his profession of architect, had often longed for more adventurous living than the pleasant, ordered days of Halifax could offer. He was thrilled by the thought that he owned all this cared-for, fertile land; these grazing creatures, who did not know him for their master; all these flowering trees, straining towards fruition; even the tender, helpless violets were his to protect. The desire to protect was (though unknown to himself) the strongest instinct of his nature.

His thoughts were interrupted by a chorus of shouts and halloos in some field ahead. There were cries of: "Head them off there! Whoa! Whoa! They're Vale's horses! Catch the mare! Whoa, girl!"

He began to run. Now there were open fields on either hand. There came a thud of horses' hoofs. Then he saw Newbigging, Gunn, and McKay trying to catch the galloping beasts, while Windmill stood astride of the fence and shouted orders. Some of Mr. Jerrold's men came running up headed by Hobbs. He was swearing vigorously.

"Why in Hell don't you fellows mend your fences? This is the second time in a week those horses have broken into our place."

"Make it a month, Hobbs," drawled Windmill.

"No. A week. . . . Look at that now! There'll be mischief done yet."

Derek now perceived that only six of the animals were his; and that the men were endeavouring to separate them from Mr. Jerrold's horses, a much handsomer lot, who were mingling wildly with the intruders, snorting and giving vicious kicks as they flew past. The Grimstone horses were led by two long-tailed Welsh ponies—mother and son, Derek afterwards learned, and it was absurd to see the heavy farm horses capering and careering at the beck of these vicious little fellows. The men ran till the sweat poured down their faces, yelling, waving their arms, and dodging kicks. At last Windmill leaped from the fence and joined the chase. Hobbs, seeing Derek, came to him.

"I hope you'll improve your fences, Mr. Vale. Your uncle never would. This sort of thing's a disgrace, happening every little while. Look at that now. I knew it would happen. Well, it's not our fault."

Blood was running down the flank of one of the Grimstone horses. He paused for a moment, trembling, then, with a plunge that sent a spray of red drops over the man who had approached him, he was off again. "Fools!" muttered Hobbs, and threw down his cap. Suddenly, springing, with surprising agility, in front of the ringleader, he caught her dexterously by the nose and brought her sharply to a halt. Her son, seeing his mother captured, stopped of his own accord, and laid his head across her shoulders. In a few minutes the horses were separated and Vale's were being

led quietly through the break in the fence by the crest-fallen men.

Derek could not but admire Hobbs for accomplishing in a flash what all these fellows had failed to do. He came up laughing, his face red, and self-conscious.

"I have to show 'em, every now and then," he said. "But it's nothing to be cock-a-hoop about. Any live man could have done it. Miss Jerrold and her father saw the whole thing. They are in the meadow beyond on their horses."

He pointed beyond the pasture. Derek saw a man on a tall grey horse, and a woman on a slender chestnut. She rode side-saddle. He could see a gleam of bright brown hair beneath her small black hat. He said:

"Mr. Jerrold looks to be a big man."

"He's the biggest man, and the handsomest man in the county. There's just the two of them. Always together. Come on across and I'll give ye an introduction."

"Thanks, not today. I'll have to see about my horse. He's bleeding pretty freely."

"Better telephone for the vet., and have him put a few stitches in. And you ought to get rid of those little Welsh devils. They're a perfect nuisance. They were just pets of your uncle's. Odd old fellow."

Derek resented Hobbs's interference. He determined to keep the ponies. Leaving Hobbs abruptly, he went to them where they stood together beneath a tree in the lane, reaching up with soft lips for the tender foliage. He patted the moist, shaggy sides, and they turned to stare at him, slowly drawing in the green leaves that projected from the corners of their mouths.

Looking up he saw that Hobbs had crossed the pasture and was talking to the Jerrolds. Telling them, doubtless, that he was not cock-a-hoop over what he had done. Per-

haps telling them that their new neighbour had refused to be introduced. . . . Well, he did not care. He would meet the Jerrolds; but not through Hobbs.

4.

As he neared the house, he overtook a man on foot, driving a team of yellow-maned horses, harnessed to a harrow. Two little boys ran alongside. When the man was aware of Derek he drew up his horses and turned to him with a wide, pale smile.

"I am your next-door neighbour," he said, "H. P. Chard. I daresay you've heard of me. I'm pleased to welcome you to the neighbourhood. We need more enterprising young men around here."

They shook hands. Chard's smile deepened to a grin. "I do hope you'll soon feel at home here, and be one of us. I don't know what church you belong to, but we all go together to the Methodist Church at Mistwell. You'll get a hearty welcome there."

"Thanks. Are those your boys?"

"Yes. I've four boys, and four girls. And they all look alike."

Derek, observing the dingy tow heads of the youngsters, and their broad, pasty faces, of which the nostrils seemed the only noticeable feature, thought it a pity, but he said:

"They look lively."

"They are. And they're all trained to help as soon as they're able. We're great workers, Mr. Vale. And I must be moving on now. It's near dinner-time. Good day."

Derek watched his figure in soiled khaki shirt and trousers move away, with a strong feeling of distaste for the man.

As he sat at his midday dinner he suddenly remembered the harrow, and he stopped Phoebe as she was about to return to the kitchen.

"What harrow was that Chard was taking away?"

"Oh, it was ours. He always borrers it."

"Hasn't he one of his own?"

"No. Mrs. Machin lets him borrer anythink he wants. He's such a hard worker."

"Humph. What sort of pudding is this?"

"Spotted Dick."

"Spotted Dick! Good Lord! Why Dick? and why spotted?" He blew a spoonful. "It's awfully hot."

"It's spotted because of the raisins, and it's Dick—just 'cause it is. It's a clout puddin', y' see."

He did not see, but he attacked it vigorously.

CHAPTER III

Lift Up Your Hearts

1.

By Derek's first Sunday at Grimstone he had explored every corner of the farm; had pushed his way through the densest undergrowth of the wood; knew when certain cows were expected to calve, and a mare to foal; and had even had a lesson in ploughing from Hugh McKay, which the others ceased working to observe with tolerant amusement.

He felt a sort of peace and repose on this warm, bright morning which, he liked to think, was the feeling experienced by labourers of the soil on peaceful Sunday morns. He stood with Newbigging smoking in silence while they both gazed across the lake. There was a land wind, warm, and sweet with the fragrance of blossoms and moist earth.

"On days when it blows like this," said Newbigging, at last, "ye can always see yon wide strip of pinkish red next the shore. It's awful bonny, I think, for it makes the other part green by contrast."

"The cliffs are red shale," said Derek, "and I expect it extends for some distance. As you say, it's—bonny."

"It makes a mon restive wi' the fairm work, sir. Though I do like it here, and I'll stick by ye through the summer and the apple-pickin'."

"Good. Can you tell me, Newbigging, what sort of trees these are? I don't know them. They're alive with black squirrels. There are white buds on the branches, too."

"These are elm-locusts with the coarse bark. See this bit of iron projecting. It's just a hint, sir, of a bridle hook

fastened there generations ago, they say, for tying your horse to. But the bark's grown over it till it's well nigh hidden. The others are walnut trees. They get bushels of fine nuts off them in the autumn. That's why there are so many squirrels hereabouts. I think it'd be fine to be a squirrel, Mr. Vale, always independent, and out of reach, livin' up next the sky, and speirin' for nuts."

"I'm afraid you're a dissatisfied fellow, Newbigging," Derek said, laughing.

"Weel, I micht have done worse. I'd sooner be mysel', for instance, than Chaird yonder, goin' off to the Methodist Chapel wi' his fat wife, and eight yellow-faced bairns."

Derek had a glimpse of a waggonette, packed with his neighbour's family and drawn by the yellow-maned horses. Newbigging gave a sly smile. He said:

"I suppose you'll be wantin' me to get the dogcart for ye? There'll be no time to spare."

"Thanks; no," said Derek. "But I suppose you and the other Scots are going. You're a nation of churchgoers, aren't you?"

"When we're at home perhaps. But not one of the three of us have been inside a church since we left the Old Land. But I'm English Church mysel'. I used to sing in the choir in St. Mary's, in Dundee, when I was a lad." He looked thoughtful for a moment and then he said:

"Look here, Mr. Vale. If I get the cart for ye, would ye drive to the English Church at Brancepeth? Mr. Jerrold and his daughter go there. It's a pretty drive along the shore." He looked genuinely eager.

To Derek suddenly came a recollection of the two figures on horseback, and of the brightness of Miss Jerrold's hair under her black hat . . . and he had not yet seen Brancepeth. "Very well, Newbigging," he said, "I believe I shall go to church."

Newbigging soon brought around a good bay gelding harnessed to a heavy-wheeled dogcart. The road to Brancepeth lay close along the shore, now high, and, it seemed, dangerously near the edge of the bluffs; now dipping suddenly to cross some willow-shaded stream. Orchards in a storm of bloom trooped almost to the water's edge. Brancepeth was sedate, respectable, very different from the rowdy, good-humored poverty of Mistwell. He left his horse in the stable of the Duke of York, a deep-porched little hotel near the church.

He was late, and had half a mind not to go in. He pushed the inner green baize door a few inches open and saw the congregation kneeling. A low murmur came from them—"That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life." . . . . Like the subdued sound of waves their voices rose and fell in solemn prayer and muffled response. Then came a scraping of feet, a relieved heaving of bodies, and they rose. Derek felt his arm grasped from behind, and a stout, determined-looking gentleman pushed him irrevocably inside, and conducted him to a pew. He took a prayer book from the rack before him, and found the place. As he mechanically sang the words of the *Venite*, he looked about for the Jerrolds. Then he remembered that he had no way of recognizing them except that Hobbs had told him that Mr. Jerrold was the handsomest man in the countryside. Decidedly then, he was not the man directly in front of him with the sloping shoulders, red hair, and protruding ears. Nor the one opposite with the officious Adam's Apple and nasal voice. Could it have been he who led him into the church? He thought not. . . . . Then, suddenly he saw them; considerably in advance of him, across the aisle. That was certainly the massive figure he had seen on horseback. He seemed to rise above the commonplace figures about him like a dark rock out of an

expanse of shingle. Of his face, Derek could see only the healthy olive cheek, and, as he turned a little, a regular profile, with beautifully cut mouth and chin. Miss Jerrold was almost hidden by her father but, once, when she remained on her feet a second longer than he, Derek had a glimpse of a fair oval face framed in the bronze-gold hair, surmounted this time by a violet-coloured toque.

He thought of Edmund in the old garrison church at Halifax. He would write and describe the Jerrolds to Edmund, and make him envious.

The rector was a robust, smooth-shaven man and he preached in a hearty way, as though he enjoyed the sound of his own vibrant voice. He preached so long that Derek lost the thread of what he was saying and began to fidget. Mr. Jerrold began to fidget, too. He crossed and recrossed his legs, and turned sidewise in his pew to get more room for his length of limb. Derek could now see him very plainly. He saw him remove his watch an inch or two from his waistcoat pocket. An expression of chagrin crossed his handsome face. It had stopped. Surreptitiously he began to wind it. The sound it made was scarcely audible to Derek but he perceived at once that the clergyman heard it. He ceased his asseverations that the Fruit of the Spirit is long-suffering, and fixed his eyes very sternly on Mr. Jerrold.

Mr. Jerrold's colour rose, but he continued winding. Absolute silence prevailed except for the one delicate, persistent sound. When he had finished, Mr. Jerrold returned the watch to his pocket, folded his arms on his powerful chest, and raised his eyes with a look of encouraging interest to the clergyman. The sermon proceeded.

At last those who were not remaining for the Communion Service rose to go. Derek felt under the pew for his hat; then he saw a whispered conference between the Jerrolds, and hesitated. Very few were remaining—only about

twenty—among them the Jerrolds. A compelling impulse made Derek lay his hat down. Then he half rose. Then he encountered the stare of the man with the nasal voice, across the aisle, and he dropped to his knees. There was a creaking of large boots, and the man who had led him in, moved up to the pew behind him. There was now no hope of escape. He buried his face on his arm and tried to compose his mind.

"Lift up your he-earts." The sonorous, muffled tones came from a long way off, it seemed.

"We lift them up unto the Lo-ord," moaned the twenty people on a note of abject misery.

Across his arm Vale saw Miss Jerrold's head drooping above her clasped hands; like some lovely flower bending to receive the dew of Heaven, he thought, and felt surprised at his own poetic fancy. There was a movement now towards the chancel. He shut his eyes for a time, and when he opened them it was his turn to go forward. Mr. Jerrold and his daughter were already in the aisle and he stepped out directly behind them. . . . . The man with the creaking boots pressed close after, and they stood motionless for a space between the rows of staring choir boys, while three women who had just received the Communion, filed past them with meekly lowered eyes.

The sunlight through stained glass windows fell in ruddy efflorescence on the white silk altar-cloth. Derek knelt, and fixed his eyes on the solemn shine of the cross. Then altar and cross were hidden by the billowing folds of a surplice, and sacred words were murmured above his head. . . . . When he rose to his feet his eyes fell on Mr. Jerrold. He was still kneeling; erect and motionless as the brass eagle of the lectern.

2.

Some impulse, and he was frequently the subject of unexpected impulses, caused Derek to hurry from the church and climb into his cart at the Duke of York without another glance in the direction of the Jerrolds. The gelding was wild to be home, and stretched his long legs to good purpose along the sandy road. In spite of this Mr. Jerrold overtook him, driving a pair of spirited horses whose silver chains made a sprightly clatter as they passed.

As Derek turned in at his own gate he saw his neighbour's family entering theirs. Chard saw him also and solemnly raised his whip to the brim of his hat. When Derek next met him a degree of sourness had crept into his pale smile.

Newbigging and Gunn took his horse, both clambering into the cart and driving at a gallop to the stables. Derek had alighted near the open door of the empty apple-house, and, glancing in as he passed, he saw Phœbe and McKay inside. He had his arms around her, and evidently pinched her, for she screamed and slapped him. His attentions to her usually took the form of squeezing and pinching, and from their vicinity there often issued her cries of delighted discomfort.

Indoors was a smell of hot roast beef. Derek, thinking of the two in the apple-house, broke into a merry whistle.

3.

In the afternoon he had descended the tottering flight of steps that were sunk into the bank before the house, and was stretched on the fine sand listening to the cries of the gulls and the rhythmic wash of the waves upon the shore. He was very drowsy, indeed almost asleep, when he felt the contact of a moist tongue on his cheek, and looked up into the face of a rough-haired Irish terrier. Mr. Jerrold

was cautiously descending the steps accompanied by two other dogs.

"If these steps give way, and I break my leg," he called out, "you are responsible, Mr. Vale. Come away, Badger, you rascal!" He crossed the sand and Derek sprang to his feet.

"Mrs. Machin told me I should find you down here. I hope you're not hiding from her. I'm sure I'd be afraid of her. I am William Jerrold, a neighbour of yours. I came to see if you will come over to my place and have a cup of tea with us. I saw you in church this morning. How did you like it?"

"That's very kind of you," said Vale. "I liked the church. Good sermon, too."

They both laughed. "My watch was rather unmanageable, wasn't it? But Ramsey has forgiven me. He's at the house now. You'll like him—out of church, anyway."

"I liked him in church. But his sermon was certainly long."

"Get him talking about strawberry-growing, or poultry raising, or the best recipe for jugged hare, and he's decidedly interesting."

They had climbed the steps and were walking along the road now. Derek watched Mr. Jerrold's face with interest as he talked. In his rough tweed coat and soft hat he looked even more handsome than in church. His black wavy hair, which was becoming thin at the forehead, still curled closely around his temples. His finely moulded mouth expressed at once, engaging good humour and an ardent, quick temper. But it was his large, dark eyes under their black brows, eyes pathetic, wistful, yet full of fire, that stirred the emotions of the observer.

The two men were strongly contrasted, yet a boyish love of life and a certain pleasure in their own bodies drew them

together, and each found much in the other to attract. They were talking like familiar friends when they reached the door of Durras. A fire burned in the drawing-room and its light was softly given back by ornaments of brass and silver, and dark polished wood.

Derek was introduced to Miss Jerrold and Mr. Ramsey, and a stout Aberdeen terrier was tipped from a chair to make room for him. He was provided with a cup of tea and a scone; the Aberdeen which a moment before had seemed stupefied by sleep, sat up briskly before him waving its forepaws, and fixing him with glowing, greedy eyes.

"That is Sgiath," said Miss Jerrold. "She is a great nuisance."

"Dear old Sgiath," said Mr. Ramsey, "come and have a bit of scone."

Sgiath turned to him without enthusiasm and he gave her a morsel, taking care that her nose should not touch his hand.

"Sgiath always favours the newest friend with her attentions," said Miss Jerrold, as the terrier returned to Derek and again sat up with agitated forepaws.

"She knows I like her," said Derek in a low tone.

"And that Mr. Ramsey is only pretending to like her." She looked into his eyes with an amused and friendly smile. He thought he had never seen a face in which reserve and mobility were so delicately blended.

Mr. Ramsey said: "I was delighted that you should so soon join us in partaking of the Holy Eucharist, Mr. Vale. I am sorry to say that your uncle was not a regular communicant. Your promptness is all the more agreeable."

"I was there, too," said Mr. Jerrold, with a challenging smile.

"And equally welcome," affirmed the clergyman.

"I had to do something to make up for the ill behaviour of my watch."

"Mr. Jerrold, I give you my permission to bring the clock from your stable tower and wind it, if you will become a regular communicant."

"That's handsome of you, and I'll consider it," returned his host. "Have another scone, Ramsey. And you, Mr. Vale. That rascal, Sgiath, has eaten half of yours."

"Did you notice our Communion vessels?" asked Mr. Ramsey. "They are unusually beautiful. They were presented to the church by Queen Anne."

"I'm afraid I didn't. Everything was new to me, and I am very unobservant."

"I must let you examine them some day. The chasing is very beautiful."

"How is your poultry?" interrupted Mr. Jerrold.

"He has the most amazing White Wyandottes," said Miss Jerrold. "They always lay when our hens are either moulting, or setting, or just too fat. Hobbs can never get our Leghorns or Dorkings to lay like that."

"Yet he is always boasting about them," said Mr. Ramsey. "I never meet him but he has some record broken."

"Hobbs is a good man with cattle," declared Mr. Jerrold, "but he does not understand poultry as you do."

"They take a great deal of understanding, but they repay you in the end. Why, bless you, I don't know how I should make ends meet if it weren't for mine. I shipped forty-eight dozen eggs this week. At thirty cents a dozen that amounts to fourteen dollars and forty cents. Not bad, eh? Of course, the commission comes off that, still it's not bad. And I shall soon have some plump broilers ready."

"Poor little darlings," put in Miss Jerrold.

"Oh, but my dear young lady, we couldn't have those

young cockerels all over the place. And they've had a very happy life."

"But so short." She looked pensive.

"I shall let all mine grow up to be hardy old cocks," said Derek.

"And Mrs. Machin will make you eat them in the end," retorted the clergyman. He went on: "Now, what do you suppose happened while I was at church this morning? I had six hens setting in an old corn crib, and if you'll believe me, they all hatched their broods during the service. Thirteen apiece. When I fed them at eight o'clock there were just a few shells chipped. When I went to them after Matins, there were seventy-eight little chicks, all dry, and as yellow as daffodils. 'Worthy old hens!' I exclaimed, 'you have my deepest respect.' "

"When had you set them?" asked Miss Jerrold, innocently.

"Three weeks ago to the very day."

"On a Sunday," shouted Mr. Jerrold. "Well done, Grace! You cornered him. The parson sets six hens on the Sabbath. No wonder my watched stopped!"

"Come, this is too cruel," expostulated Mr. Ramsey. "What was I to do? The hens were clucking. The eggs were warm. I said a little prayer over each, and so made a respectable ceremony of it. The resultant chicks look as though they had just fluttered down from Heaven."

It was plain that he was eager to spend the remainder of the afternoon talking about his poultry, but Mr. Jerrold proposed that they take a stroll about the farm. He wanted to show Derek the stock, and to get Mr. Ramsey's opinion of a new mare.

The two older men walked ahead, Derek following with Grace Jerrold. He felt an increasing sense of happiness in

the possession of such pleasant neighbours, especially since they seemed inclined to make him one of their little circle.

"Do you know, it's quite exciting to us to have a new neighbour," she said, as they crossed the lawn. "You have been one of the principal topics of our conversation since you came."

"I was afraid I was in disgrace since my horses break into your place so often. About once a week, I think Hobbs said."

"Oh, that just provides a little agreeable excitement for the men. Please don't mend the fences."

"It was very good of your father to fetch me to tea."

"Oh, I sent him." She had, it seemed, an ingenuous little way of beginning her sentences with "Oh," like a child. Then she added quickly, with a flush—"I thought you might be lonely—so far from home."

"I was—a little. There are just my brother and myself. I feel very much separated from him here."

"It's a lonely spot," she said. "We have lived here six years, since I lost my mother. I should be very lonely if father and I were not such good companions. We go about the place together all day, and at night we read aloud, or play cribbage."

"I admire your father tremendously. He attracts me more than any other man I can remember."

Her eyes were bright with pleasure. "He is attractive, isn't he? And very clever, too. But, really, I believe I have the better business head of the two. I mean I think I have a clearer grasp of the essentials, and I don't get enthusiastic over new projects till I've looked into them a bit."

"What's that, Grace?" said Mr. Jerrold, turning round suddenly. "What's she saying about me?"

"I was remarking, William dear, that I have a better

brain for business than you. Mr. Vale says he can easily believe it."

They were entering the stables now, and her father replied: "Well, Mr. Vale may see for himself how I manage these."

The new mare was inspected, a daughter of Hearts Courageous, twice winner of the King's Plate. But the sixty milch cows in their immaculate stalls, the black and white of their soft coats gleaming, their overdeveloped udders pink and clean, roused in Derek both admiration and envy. His own little Jersey herd, of which he had been so proud dwindled to insignificance. Mr. Jerrold, and Hobbs who had joined them, expatiated on the superior virtues of the Holstein. Hobbs said he wouldn't give a Jersey stable room.

4.

It seemed natural that Derek and Grace Jerrold should eventually separate from the others, while she took him to see the rose garden where the tight little olive buds were barely in sight, and the kitchen garden already heavy with the scent of lilacs. They followed the stream that entered Durras from Grimstone till they reached a low-lying meadow so wet they could not cross it. Here marsh marigolds crowded in golden profusion, more brilliant, it seemed to Derek, than anything he had ever seen.

"I think Durras is beautiful," he said. "It is like a fine English place. I had not expected anything so—mellow."

"It used to be a part of Grimstone, you know, till about thirty years ago when our predecessor bought it from your grandfather. Aren't you sorry he bought it?"

"No," said Derek, positively, "I'm very glad. I shouldn't know what to do with such a big slice of land. Besides, I want you for neighbours. It's much jollier."

"This place is a great expense." She drew a deep breath that was almost a sigh.

They now were retracing their steps. A primrose yellow filled the sky behind the burnished bloom of the cherry orchards.

They were silent a while, then, as they drew near the gate Derek said, "I've been wondering, Miss Jerrold, if I were to rig up a tennis court, whether you would come over and play."

"Oh, I should love to! But why can't we have it here? Our lawns are more level, I think."

"I want *some* attraction at Grimstone," he said, and she remarked, though not for the first time, that look of happy expectancy in his greenish-blue eyes.

CHAPTER IV

Sale at Durras—Gretta van Lowe

1.

*E*very spring Mr. Jerrold held a sale of his surplus cattle, and those interested in Holstein breeding came long distances to be present. It was the principal event of the year in the neighbourhood of Brancepeth and Mistwell. Waggonettes, dogcarts, and motors were sent to meet the morning trains, and a substantial lunch was set out in Hobbs's house for those who had made long journeys. There was also a steady stream of farmers' vehicles up to the time of the sale, and for two days after it there was the business of driving or carting away the purchased stock.

The morning broke cloudy and cold. Jagged lines of foam curled across a steel grey lake. Farmers driving by had their collars turned up to their ears. Jock, the collie, raced up and down the road barking ceaselessly. Derek decided to take Windmill with him for company. He would have liked to give the four men a half holiday that they might all go, but he was afraid of Mrs. Machin. There was no doubt about it, he was afraid of her.

There she stood on the flagstones outside the kitchen door, the wind blowing her apron in snowy folds about her stiff black person, her lips twisted in a smile of contempt for the hurrying passersby.

"Fools," she said. "Tumblin' over themselves to pay fancy prices fur cows that's no better than any other cows only they're fed up till their bags is fit to bust. You stop crammin' the high-priced feed down 'em and they soon stop

their fancy milkin'. Them Jerrolds make me sick. I can tell you, your uncle had no use for him."

"Why?"

"Well, fur one thing he pays higher wages than anyone hereabouts can afford, and that makes it hard fur the farmers to get good help. Then, when he first come here, he asked old Mr. Vale's advice about his small fruit, and your uncle went over and advised him just what to do and when to do it. But after a couple o' seasons' worry with pickers my fine gentleman flew in a temper and had it all ploughed under and swore he wouldn't have a berry on the place. Your uncle had no respect fur him after that. . . . . Phœbe! have ye naught to do but stand gapin' at them ninnys goin' by? Get back to your churn, and be quick about it."

2.

Tiers of seats were raised about the auctioneer's stand for the accommodation of the crowd. These were well filled when Derek and Windmill arrived, so they had to be content with places at the back. From there they looked down over a lively scene. Horses and vehicles of all sorts were tied to trees and fences on the outskirts of the crowd; late comers were hurrying to secure what positions they could; Hobbs was shouting orders to stablemen who were already leading out the heavy, slow-moving animals; the auctioneer and his assistant were consulting over a list. Mr. Jerrold sat on his grey horse near the stand, an expression of mingled pride and amusement on his face.

The auctioneer was loquacious, animated; he punctuated the sales by racy anecdotes; the prices paid filled Derek with surprise. More and more as the afternoon wore on he longed to possess one of these peerless, soft-eyed creatures as the foundation of a new and lucrative herd. Windmill continually urged him to buy, saying that he only wished

he had the chance. The auctioneer drew attention to the line of the back, the shape of the udder and teats, the milk-vein of the animal before him. The calf at her side, he affirmed, was the sweetest thing that had ever come under his hammer. The mother had a record of 640 pounds of butter from 17,610 pounds of milk. He was shocked at the languid bidding.

Truly it was getting late, and many were leaving to catch their trains. Derek felt that it was an auspicious time to bid. After a short struggle between himself and an unseen, husky-voiced competitor, the pair were knocked down to him, and the auctioneer congratulated him on the excellence of his judgment. Mr. Jerrold met him as he was leaving and said he had done something he would never repent. He was delighted that Gretta would be next door where he could watch her progress, for she was one of his favourites.

Windmill remained to get the cow, and as Derek walked briskly home, he felt a new sense of elation and proprietorship in Grimstone.

Mrs. Machin was laying tea-towels on the gooseberry bushes in the kitchen garden, and she turned enquiringly toward him as though to ask how the sale had gone. For some reason he did not wish to tell her of his purchase just then. He passed her and went on to the stream, on whose grassy bank he could see Hugh McKay shearing sheep. Gunn, Newbigging, and Phœbe were looking on, now and then giving a helping hand.

The sheep lay as though dead, her pale tongue lolling, her legs stiff; only her thick, white eyelashes flickered above her yellow eyes as she felt the shears pass over her body.

"Ah, Rosebud," said Hugh, comfortingly, "you're no sae bad as you think you are."

"It's a fine fleece. Ain't it, Mr. Vale?" said Phœbe.

"Wonderful. Be careful not to nip her, Hugh."

McKay laughed. "I never cut a sheep in my life, sir. And there's the fleece all complete in one piece for ye. Get up, Rosebud. Are ye wantin' to lie all day?"

She sprang suddenly to her feet and ran bleating to her twin lambs, who stared in stupefication, scarce recognizing their dingy, rotund mother in this skipping, snow-white creature. They nosed her for a moment and then, ferociously, began to suck.

There was a guffaw from Newbigging, Gunn, and Phœbe, but McKay smiled tenderly at his handiwork.

"We'll be hæin' a new wee lamb afore the morn," he whispered to Vale.

"Really?" Derek looked speculatively over the little flock.

"It's Nonesopretty, over yon. I like the new lambs awful well. I wish ye'd get more sheep, Mr. Vale. This is a paltry few. I could do with five times as many."

"I bought a cow and calf at the sale," said Derek.

Phœbe overheard. "A cow from Jerrold's!" she cried. "Mrs. Machin will be in a fine taking. She hates them Holsteins. She says the milk's so poor you could see a silver coin lying in the bottom of a pail of it."

"I did not buy the cow to please her," said Derek sternly.

Nothing abashed, Phœbe chattered on. McKay caught another sheep and began shearing it. Presently they saw Windmill driving Gretta van Lowe through the gateway, her thick-legged milk-white calf gambolling at her side. Windmill drove her gently with an air of importance. As she came up to the group by the stream they closed about her, admiring her fine proportions and looking into her large, sad face. Newbigging caught the calf by the head and held him still.

"He's as big as a year-old Jersey heifer already," exclaimed Windmill proudly. "Stop your sheep shearing and look at him, Hugh."

"I've no time to spare. I'll go down to the byre and see them later."

"Here comes Mrs. Machin!"

She was approaching them at a slow, solemn gait. She did not speak but, throwing a look of bitter scorn at the cow, passed on into the barn, slamming the door behind her. She did not look in Vale's direction for weeks.

3.

The next morning Vale was about early. On the way to the stables he met Hugh McKay coming to the house carrying a newborn lamb.

"I telled ye we'd be hæn a wee lamb the morn," he said, beaming with happiness. "I thought I'd tak it to the kitchen to warm it. It's a weak one."

"You are a woolly little fellow," said Derek, stroking it. "How is Gretta, Hugh?"

"Ah, she'll no let down her milk nor taste her mash. She's homesick for the fine byre yonder. She'll do no guid."

Derek hurried to see her, full of anxiety.

Gretta van Lowe stood solemnly alone in the cow stable. The stalls must have been built for smaller cattle; her flanks projected far into the passage. An untouched pail of mash stood before her.

"Why isn't she out with the other cows?" Derek asked Gunn who was cleaning the stable.

"They all tuk after her and butted her," he replied, grinning. "There's none of them like her. They dinna like the colour o' her."

"Rubbish. Well, turn her into the yard where she'll get

the sun. She'll never thrive in this dark hole. Where's the calf?"

"In the meadow wi' the ither calves. He's fine."

Majestically Gretta left the byre and lay down in the yard.

She never reëntered. When night came she refused so stubbornly to go in with the other cows, that it was held wise to humour her. Each day after that she seemed to decline in spirits and strength. The veterinary was sent for and prescribed, but it was of no avail. Her milk became unfit for use. It was plain that she was going to die. Nothing would induce her to enter the stable, and Derek began to hate the sight of the large black and white mound in the stable-yard. He was glad when he saw her, at last, heaved on to a stone-boat and hauled to the woods for burial.

Mrs. Machin became affable.

"The vet. said it was ulcer of the stomach, didn't he?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Is Mr. Jerrold goin' to make you pay for her?"

"Just for the calf."

"Oh, well, you can easily get a good price for him, Mr. Vale."

"I'm not going to sell him," said Derek, testily. "It's my farm, and if I want an odd bull or so for a pet, I suppose I can have it."

Because he thought every one was against the young bull, it became his favorite creature on the farm.

4.

Derek had written to his brother to send him his canoe which he had left in Halifax. It arrived one evening in June, and the Scotchmen, who had never seen one before,

carried it to the stream, Derek following with Mrs. Machin and Phœbe, eager to see him set out.

"There isn't money enough in Canada to pairsuade me to go oarin' in yon skittish thing," said Newbigging, as the canoe slid into the water. "I've knocked aboot in vessels of all sorts, but I draw the line at eggshells."

"I'd go in a minute," said Phœbe, with a look at Vale.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Machin. "And don't be impident."

At the same moment Hugh McKay pinched her, and Windmill frowned and shook his head.

Derek was already paddling down the stream, enjoying the pleasant feeling that the canoe was conscious of him and responded eagerly to him. All but Mrs. Machin ran before him to the little bridge where they collected to watch him pass beneath. He was getting very fond of them, he thought, as he looked up at their excited, sunburned faces.

"Mr. Vale! Ye can paddle your ain canoe, noo," called Gunn after him.

"Take me next time, Mr. Vale!" cried Phœbe; and shrieked again at a second, severer pinch from Hugh.

He was alone save for a little group of fishing boats in the distance, and a flock of gulls that flew high above him, angelic creatures that beat their silvery wings against the rosy sky.

He paddled close to the shore in the direction of Durras, half hoping to be seen by the Jerrolds. When he guessed that he was opposite their gates he laid his dripping paddle athwart and lit a cigarette.

Scarcely had an ash formed when the figure of Grace Jerrold appeared on the bank above him. Outlined against the sky, and dressed in white, she seemed akin to the shining gulls, and, like them, more of the air than of earth.

She called, "How happy you look! Is it as nice as the North West Arm of the Harbour?"

"Oh, yes. But I miss the tang of salt in the air. Won't you come for a paddle?"

"How should I get down?"

"Fly. You look as though you might. Just spread your wings and gently float down to this blue cushion in front of me."

"I'd like to, but my father and I are going for a walk. I am waiting for him."

"Tomorrow then?"

"I'm sorry. Tomorrow I am going away on a visit. It will be several weeks. But when I come back—"

"Very well. The canoe shall be freshly varnished and the tennis court got ready."

Mr. Jerrold joined his daughter and the two stood looking down at Vale as he paddled away.

"How well he paddles."

"I can paddle just as well," said her father. "I shall go out with him sometimes while you are away, dear."

"Oh, please don't, William! You are much too heavy for a canoe. Promise me, or I sha'n't have a minute's peace."

"But I can swim like a fish, Gay."

"I know. But I don't want you two out in a canoe. You're both too reckless."

"Vale reckless?"

"Oh, yes. I think there's a headlong look in his eyes."

"And what sort of look is there in mine?" he asked, bending them on her.

"A look like a wild eagle. Will you promise?"

"Yes, darling. May I have him to dinner then? Or are you afraid we should overeat?"

"Yes, have him to dinner. Look, he is almost out of sight."

They turned to walk, holding each other's hands. The sun was gone and the clear, pale moon was gaining colour every moment. The gulls, too, had disappeared, and in their place a flock of cliff swallows darted about, silent as bats.

CHAPTER V

Dark Water Lilies

1.

The canoe had veen varnished; the tennis court was in process of preparation. Mrs. Machin grumbled because he took the men from their work to help him with his play. One morning in the latter part of June, she marched over to him, as he was directing the rolling of the lawn by Gunn and Newbigging, and said:

"Them fellas will just have to leave off that foolery to-day, and help get the Indians' shack ready. They've sent word that they'll be here tomorrow, and they'll be mad if they find the roof not mended. They was nearly flooded out before they left last year. Of course, if you don't care, Mr. Vale, what sort of accommodation you give the poor things, it don't matter to me." She folded her arms across her stomach and stared into the lake.

"I didn't know they were coming," said Vale, meekly. "Is that the little house in the orchard?"

"Yes. How did ye s'pose the fruit got picked? The strawberries is tame but they won't hop off the vines into the baskets themselves, I can tell ye. With this hot sun there'll be a pickin' ready in a day or two."

"Very well. I'll let them off in a few minutes." And he persisted for a time in the rolling, while Mrs. Machin stood by, impatient and contemptuous. He would not let her domineer over him before the men, for he had seen them grinning on more than one occasion, when he had been worsted by her.

Derek had scarcely noticed the small shack in the far end of the orchard. It was so dilapidated, so weather-beaten that he had supposed it to be but an unused out-house.

Now he stood dismayed at the squalor of the hovel. It had been thrown together of odds and ends of boards; the roof had been covered with tar paper, now flapping loosely; the one small window showed the bare interior. The mud floor was still wet from spring rains, the walls were lined with bunks half filled with evil-smelling straw. Under a lean-to outside he saw a cooking stove red with rust, and, beneath the trees, a long table with benches on either side.

"This is horrible," he said. "Do you mean to say they sleep here?"

"Indeed they do," said Mrs. Machin, "and it's better than they get lots of places. I know of farms where they just live in the barns and sleep in the mow."

"Just the same," put in Windmill, "the Government is putting a stop to that sort of thing. If an inspector comes round and finds them all sleeping in one room you're liable to get into trouble."

"How many are there?"

"About fifteen. Old Solomon Sharroe, his wife, two daughters and their husbands, some younger boys and girls, and Jammery. He's quite above the rest of them."

"We must get another room fixed up for those women. I won't stand their living like animals."

"Your uncle never minded," said Mrs. Machin.

"Well, he should have been ashamed of himself."

"Look here," said Windmill, "there's a pile of timber down by the barn. I believe we could run up an extra room for the women in no time."

"And I shall drive to Brancepeth," said Vale, "and buy a couple of bedsteads and a chest of drawers."

Mrs. Machin's disgust was so deep that she could not abide to listen to their plans. Calling Phœbe, she stalked gloomily down the orchard path, wondering audibly how long Grimstone would endure under such mismanagement.

2.

The men, delighted by a change of work, threw themselves heartily into the building of the additional room. By evening of the next day, it was not only built but the bedsteads, the chest of drawers, and a small looking-glass had been arranged inside. However, Derek held it as only a makeshift, and determined that before the next fruit season, he would have a proper cottage where the Indians could dispose themselves decently. He was eager to meet them and see their pleasure in the new comforts he had provided.

He rose early the next morning after the shack had been completed, and, after breakfast, strolled through the orchard to take a final look at it. He thought it would look rather jolly when a spiral of blue smoke curled from the rusty stove-pipe. He opened the cupboard door and looked complacently at the gaudy new set of dishes he had bought at Brancepeth. A sound of children's voices made him start. He saw what seemed a long procession of dusky people coming up the orchard path. Four little girls danced ahead while the men and women approached slowly, laden with burdens and infants. A boy of ten came last, carrying on his back an idiot boy a couple of years younger.

The women chattered cheerfully in Indian, as they came up, and stared in a friendly, amused way at Derek and the addition to the shack.

"I s'pose you're Mr. Vale," said a tall old man coming up to Derek. "Mrs. Machin, she told us we'd find you up hereabouts. I'm Solomon Sharroe, an' all these folks is my

family. We been pickin' fur your uncle a good many years. You like livin' here?"

"Yes," said Vale, "and I'm very glad to see you. The strawberries need your attention, I think."

"We get something to eat now, and then me and the other men start in. The women will want the rest of the day fur gittin' settled." His dark eyes rested indulgently on the group of women and girls, who were already lighting a fire in the stove and unpacking bread, bacon, and bottles of pickles from a basket.

There was a grave dignity about the old man that pleased Derek. His rugged, bronze face, high, deeply lined forehead surmounted by a thatch of thick iron-grey hair gave no evidence of racial degeneration. The women, too, were attractive, plump, round-faced, with soft, quick movements and shy, sidelong glances at him. The young men had disappeared inside the shack, but one of them now came out and Solomon motioned him to approach.

"This is Jammery," he announced with a wave of his dark hand on which shone a silver ring. Jammery held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Vale," he said in a soft voice.

Vale took the proffered hand. It was small, very smooth, and limp. He returned his own to his pocket after the contact.

"Are you a son or son-in-law?" he asked, the old man having been called away by his wife.

"Neither." Jammery stroked his slender, black mustache. "I'm no relation to these people. I've just thrown my lot in with theirs for a while. I'm not much of an Indian."

"No, I see that." He was indeed, only olive in complexion. "You speak English well."

Jammery gave a shrug. "I can scarcely speak Indian at all. But I know what they say."

"I suppose Jammery was originally Jean-Marie."

He shrugged again. "No idea," he said. "It's my first, last, and middle name. The only one I've got."

Derek looked him over curiously, wondering what wild and picturesque past had gone to the making of this handsome, unscrupulous-looking little fellow. "Well," he said, "if you need anything let me know. I want you to be as comfortable as possible."

"Thank you," said Jammery. "Lots of the fruit-growers don't care how we live so long as they get plenty of work out of us. They don't treat us as well as their animals."

3.

A new life and activity took possession of Grimstone. It seemed to Vale that in whatever direction he looked he saw one of the dark tribe of pickers. The men and older women set stolidly to work in the strawberry beds; the two young boys ran continually from the barn to the shack carrying armfuls of straw or tin pails of water; when he went to the kitchen the round faces of two twelve-year-old girls were pressed against the screen door. "Phœbe," one of them was calling, "kin we git a point of milk?" Seeing Vale she smiled broadly.

"What is your name, youngster?" he asked.

"Beulah. This here's my niece, my oldest sister's girl. Ain't she white?" This with candid pride. "The Government gent he wouldn't give her no allowance last time—she was so white."

The girl's skin was indeed white, but she preserved a stoical Indian calm while being discussed. Laughing-eyed Beulah chattered on: "Will you come and see our gorden? It's terr'ble pretty. We'll git the point of milk when we come back. The gorden's on the shore, won't you come? Gosh! you've got pretty hair."

Derek suffered himself to be led by Beulah and her solemn niece, Alma, to the shore. He had no idea what a gorden was, but he liked children, especially dark-eyed little girls. They made him feel weakly good-humored, almost helpless. On the sand three younger girls were bending over a miniature garden, made of bits of water-weeds and flowering grass and intersected by paved walks of broken glass and coloured stones. Derek was amazed at the nice care with which the pattern was laid, and the dainty gestures of the small brown hands as they placed a pebble or were clapped together in delight. He sat down on the sand beside them and began to build a wall around the "gorden." The children pressed about him and ran to fetch little shells to ornament the top of the wall. He caught the smallest in his hands and rolled her on the sands. "Oh, you are a fonny man!" they shrieked. They found a long grey quill from a gull's wing and stuck it in his hair, chuckling, "Now you are an Indian, like us."

Even when darkness came they were not to be ignored. A shaft of light struck through the orchard from a lantern hung by the door of the shack, and a great blaze danced up from the shore where they made a bonfire at the water's edge.

Vale, sitting with his pipe on the porch, could see flames leaping above the crest of the bluff, and he began to feel nervous lest the flying sparks should do damage. Mrs. Machin had driven into Mistwell or she would have gone down to them, he knew. By the screams and shrill laughter he felt sure that the young women and girls were in bathing and had made the fire to warm and dry themselves.

Half-amused, more than a little annoyed, he crossed the lawn, quietly passed through the gate and hid himself in the clump of stunted cedars that overlooked the shore. His nostrils were tickled by a pungent odor that quenched the

sweetness of the locust flowers. Ruddy tongues licked about a heap of driftwood and cast their fierce reflection on the water next the shore. In this molten pool five little girls, three young women, and a boy of fourteen were bathing. The boy, like a bronze imp, chased one after another of his naked sisters, the captured one being roughly splashed, and then held under water despite her cries. Their smooth, brown bodies caught the glow from the fire like copper urns; Derek could see even the jewel-like glitter of their eyes. He watched them smiling, forgetting his annoyance.

The boy, soon tiring of his easy prey, swam outward into the darkness. One of the girls raised her arms to her head to fasten the long wet hair that had fallen about her shoulders. Derek's heart gave a sudden leap; a hot thrill of pleasure stirred, like a pain, in his breast. She seemed to rise, a dark water-lily on its stem, a flower of unearthly beauty, springing from the water, fed by the flames, filling the night air with the perfume of her desire. At her side the dark head of the smallest child lay on the water between its outstretched arms like an olive-tinted bud. It was a moonless night and the sky hung low, dark as a bowl of wine.

All the bathers were motionless now, or nearly so. Yes, they were water-lilies, resting languorously in this secret place, their petals drawn together, holding the sweetness of the night.

He gazed at them each in turn, but found none so lovely as she whose slender arms still curved above her head.

She left the water and came slowly to the fire; picking up a cloth she began languidly to dry her breast. Her sisters followed her, and, as they crouched together, their interlacing limbs made intricate linear designs against the sombre glow of the subsiding fire.

When they had drawn on their dresses they ascended the steps in the bank, talking softly in Indian. Their mood of noisy gaiety seemed to have passed; their faces were pensive, even sad. They were so near for a moment that he might have touched them. He longed to put out his hand and draw that supple, sweetest one, in among the cedars, hold her in his arms, and tell her how beautiful she was.

Their feet made a little rustling in the grass; the gate creaked and they were gone.

The boy, returning to the shore, and finding himself deserted, began carefully to extinguish the fire. With sand and stones he smothered it, and, running up the steps, passed Derek, loudly whistling.

Once more the perfume of the locust flowers drenched the air; with it mingled the sharp, sweet smell of the cedars, and the faint odor of burnt wood. The waves commenced a sudden, crisp lapping on the shore, as though the business of the night had just begun. All about his feet he saw the dim, white heads of mushrooms.

"I must have some of those for my breakfast," he thought.

He re-lit his pipe and sauntered to the house.

CHAPTER VI

Cherries at Dawn

1.

A man could not help but feel proud to see the baskets of plump, ripe strawberries spread in rows over the barn floor. They were so fresh, so excellent, that they could not fail to bring the highest price. Phœbe, kneeling on the floor, packed them into crates, each holding two dozen boxes. Mrs. Machin, sitting on a chair, examined each carrier of six boxes, as it was brought in, and, if it were satisfactory, paid the picker in tickets valued at one cent each. Solomon Sharroe and Jammery, she told Vale, were the best pickers, and could pick four hundred boxes each in a day, in the height of the season. The women picked well but were not to be depended on, often leaving the patch half-picked, to take the tram-car to Brancepeth, where they would spend all their earnings on fancy shoes and hats, and, often, their men's earnings too.

Vale had taken up a basket and was picking out the largest berries and eating them with a boy's mischievous pleasure in Mrs. Machin's disapproving glances. He dropped one to a rangy Dorking rooster which was picking in the straw at his feet. The bird, snatching up the unexpected prize, gallantly called his hens who came with long strides from the barnyard, wings spread and beaks agape. The crimson berry was presented with coaxing clucks to the favourite, who gulped it whole and pecked greedily at the juice on her lord's yellow beak. Vale began tossing berries to the other hens.

"I will not have them fowls encouraged to come into the barn," exclaimed Mrs. Machin, angrily.

"But they like the berries," protested Vale.

"Well give them the whole mornin's pickin' then. I wash my hands of it." She jumped to her feet.

"Sit down. Sit down," soothed Vale. "I'll take them somewhere else. This young Indian can help me shoo them out."

"I'll help you," cried Phœbe.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Machin. "I never see such a girl. She'd sooner do anything under the sun than her proper work. Here, Fawnie, help Mr. Vale scare these hens away and don't set them floppin' over the berries neither."

The young girl set down the carrier she had brought and began gently to urge the fowls through the door. Derek went ahead dropping berries before them. He saw that she was the girl he had watched the night before, whose shining brown-black hair had fallen about her wet shoulders. He scarcely glanced at her but led the way around the barn towards the poultry house, which was partitioned by wire netting from the byre.

"I think we had better put them inside," he said, "and shut the door or they will follow us straight back to the berries." He opened the half-door and entered the poultry-house backwards. He set the remainder of the basket of berries in the straw on the floor. Instantly it was covered by a tangle of wings, beaks, and wattles. He shut the door and smiled at the girl. "That was neatly done. They're all in, I think."

The open windows looked over a stream and a flat meadow where the sheep were grazing.

"The little new lambs are awful pretty," she said in a soft, husky voice.

"Yes, aren't they?" He stared openly at her now, trying to recapture the sensation of the night before. But now he saw only a pretty Indian girl whose straight little body was covered by a coarse blue dress, who had an empty berry-basket tied on her stomach, and whose pouting lips were stained by the fruit to a brighter red. There was no mystery now, no thrill, but she was amusing; and those fawn's eyes of hers . . . they called her Fawnie . . . and that round coffee-coloured neck with the soft lock on the nape. . . .

"I like eggs," she was drawling, while she peered into the nests. "Here's a big brown one—as hot as hot—" she put it in his hand. "That ole black hen laid it. She's mad because I took it."

He dropped the warm egg in her berry basket. "Keep it," he said, "and cook it for your tea, Fawnie."

"Here's five more. All white. I do like white eggs. They're jus' laid too. Hot as hot. Feel."

"Take them, too. But don't mention it to Mrs. Machin." He flushed as he said this. He was really afraid of her then . . . no—not afraid, but he did not want her interference.

"Tell you what I'll do! I'll set them. You jus' lend me this ole black hen that's all rumpled up cluckin' an' I'll take her up to the shack an' set her and get some nice little chicks, eh?" Her eyes sparkled, he could see his face reflected in them . . . useless for him to resist dark-eyed little girls. . . . "Take her then," he said, weakly. Good Lord, she was only seventeen! If she wanted a hen to set, why not?

They chased the hen, caught her; Fawnie pressed her firmly against her side while they searched for more eggs. In the horse-stable they found seven—five on a shelf inside

an old horse-collar, two in the manger of one of the Welsh ponies, wet with his slobber.

They set out like children, Derek carrying the eggs in his hat. They took a roundabout way to the shack through the arching blackberry and thimbleberry canes. Two babies rolled on a blanket on the beaten earth, by the door, tended by an older child. The idiot boy, perched in the crotch of an apple tree, stared blinking at the sky.

"Where shall we set her?" asked Derek.

"Under my bunk," she chuckled. "It's nice an' dark there."

"Oh no. I'll get a coop and set her in the orchard."

"The ole woman'd find her there first thing. I want her under my bunk." She stroked the hen's head with a brown, supple hand.

"Very well. Which is your bunk?" They went into the dim hut, stuffy with the smell of straw and old clothes.

"Beulah and Alma and me sleeps in this one," she said, crouching before one of the lower bunks. "You hold the hen."

He held the warm bundle of feathers while she dragged forth an empty box and half-filled it with straw pulled from her bed. Derek felt hypnotized by her soft, swift movements. She talked in a little muttering way to herself as she arranged the nest:

"Here's nice yaller straw already warmed—here's a nasty ole thistle—get out you ole pricky thistle on the floor—I hope Alma will step on you—here's a pigeon's feather sure enough—that brings luck—come lazy-bones—" reaching up for the hen—"get on your eggs an' mind you hatch 'em all out or Durek will pluck you alive, won't you, Durek?"

Derek lit a cigarette to drown the odors of the shack. "Who told—you—my name?" he asked, between puffs.

"I heerd Phœbe an' Bob Gunn talkin' about you an' they

called you Durek. They said you was afraid of Mrs. Machin. Are you?"

"A little," he admitted. "Are you?"

"Not a bit. I ain't afraid of nobody—except Jammery . . . If any of them kids touches this hen o' mine I'll chop their heads off. Ain't she nice?"

The hen was settling herself on the nest with elaborate care. Every feather on end she drew the eggs under her body by convulsive movements of her encircling wings. With her beak she pressed the last one under her full, downy breast. She looked from side to side to make sure that none protruded, then, with a last shudder of sensuous delight, she half-closed her eyes, parted her beak, and settled down to her twenty-one days' vigil and retreat.

2.

It was an extraordinarily fine season for fruit. The strawberries ran a luxuriant course, without burning heat to shrivel them or storms to beat them into the soil. Cherries were not successful everywhere, but the cherries at Grimstone hung in large, plump clusters that almost hid the foliage. The raspberries were the finest in years, and a good crop of pears and apples was promised. Not only was there an abundance of fruit but the stock was doing well. Six of the ewes had twins, there were seven little Jersey calves, and a likely-looking foal. In the heavy soil at the back of the farm there was a fine showing of oats, wheat, and plump roots. Derek had had the fences between Grimstone and Durras mended and intended in the autumn to paint some of the out-buildings and build new houses for the pigs and poultry separate from the other stock. He wrote enthusiastic letters to his brother, urging him to pay him a visit while the fruit was in its prime and the boating and bathing good.

He was eating his bacon and eggs one morning, his brain

busy with agreeable plans, when he heard excited voices in the kitchen.

"I'll go and tell him," he heard Phœbe say.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," came sharply from Mrs. Machin, "just let me get my hands out of this flour and I'll tell him myself."

Then Newbigging spoke: "Whist, can't ye? I'll go mysel'."

He came to the door, cap in hand.

"Weel," he announced, with a grin, "they've flitted."

"Flitted? Who? Where?"

"The Indians. They've all gone to Chaird's to pick. There's neither hide nor hair o' them aboot the place." The others crowded about him, staring in at Derek.

He set down his teapot with a bang. Why was bad news so often announced in the middle of a comfortable meal? "Why did they go?" he asked. "What do you expect me to do about it?"

"Chaird has gie'd them a fine new cottage he had built for his parents who died last winter, and he has twice as many raspberry canes an' currants an' blackcaps coming on. His missus is goin' to teach the girls to sew an' read, and she's goin' to doctor the bairn that has fits."

"He wouldn't have dared do this in your uncle's time, the scoundrel," said Mrs. Machin.

"You're changing your tune about him, aren't you?" said Windmill, sarcastically. "But he's only living up to his reputation for shrewdness."

"Good God," said Vale, "what shall we do? Can't we force them to come back? The cherries are fairly dropping off the trees for ripeness."

No one answered him. They had turned back to the kitchen with angry looks towards someone who had come

in. Then Derek heard the soft voice of Jammery. He followed the others into the kitchen.

Jammery stood in the open doorway, an amused smile curving his sensitive lips.

"Well," cried Mrs. Machin, "this is a nice way to treat us after all these years, and all we've done for you."

"It's not my fault, really," protested Jammery. "It's the old man. Mr. Chard got around him somehow, and we've got to do what he says or he and the old woman'd make the place too hot to hold us."

"What is to become of my fruit?" demanded Vale. "Where are the white pickers who used to pick for Chard—the mean cur—could we get them?"

"They have a prejudice agin us here because we've always employed Indians," said Mrs. Machin. "But we've got to get pickers from somewheres, for tomorrow's the last day for the Saturday market."

"I was thinking," said Jammery, "that if Mr. Vale will pay my way I'll go to Brancepeth and see a family of Indians I know there. I might be able to get them."

"If you do I'll make it worth your while." Already Vale was growing hopeful for his cherries. "And you fellows," he added, turning to his men, "can get busy and help pick. I shall take a hand at it myself."

"I'm cuttin' hay," protested Hugh McKay.

"Cuttin' hay, are you?" snapped Mrs. Machin. "I'm glad you told me. I thought you was just standin' there gapin'."

"Weel, I'm goin' to cut it, if I can ever get out o' this kitchen," shouted McKay, angrily, and, pushing Jammery out of his way, he flung off to his fields.

Mrs. Machin turned to Windmill. "You take the light wagon and go into Mistwell and see what left-overs you can pick up. Tell them the pickin's fine and there'll be hot

tea supplied at noon. Bob and Jim and Phœbe and I can turn right in now."

That afternoon as Derek stood beside a prolific young Montmorency, dropping its blood-red clusters into an eleven-quart basket at his feet, Mr. Jerrold called.

"I hear your Indians have decamped," he said. "Gone over to our friend Chard, eh?"

"Yes. We're all doing our best to save the cherries, but the raspberries need going over and I don't see how it's to be done. Jammery went to Brancepeth after pickers. Had no luck at all. And I wish you could see the bunch Windmill got at Mistwell: two fat old women, three little boys, and a young married woman named Orde with a two-year-old child that has to be suckled every ten minutes or so."

"Oh, I know the Ordes. He fishes in the winter and loafs all summer while she supports him by picking berries. I tell you, Vale, small fruit is the very devil. That's why I ploughed mine under. I know a poor chap from the city who got a place beyond mine, and planted an immense lot of gooseberries. Last summer he came to me with tears streaming down his face. He couldn't get a soul to pick the damned gooseberries and he had been working at them alone till he was worn to fiddle-strings and his hands all scratched and bleeding. His wife was going to have a baby, too."

"Lord! What became of them?"

"We got a spell of heat and drought then and they all withered up on him. He was sold out last spring."

"Poor beggar. Well, Jammery's coming over at daybreak tomorrow to pick till noon when we ship. He is quite a decent fellow."

"I shouldn't trust him. Look here what I've done for you." Holding his walking-stick under one arm he had picked cherries till one large, shapely hand was brimming.

"Fine," said Derek, "just drop them in the basket."

"I'll light a cigar before I pick any more. Have one?"

"No thanks. Too busy."

"I wish Gay were here. She'd enjoy this."

"When is she coming back?"

"Very soon. She can't stay away from her father very long."

Newbigging came up, a full basket in either hand. "Hoo many hae ye plucked, Mr. Vale?" he asked, cheerily.

"This is my third. How are the Mistwell folk getting on?"

"Not too bad. Mrs. Orde's away the best, but she has to back down her ladder every wee while to nurse the bairn."

The child, unspeakably dirty, ran up to Newbigging and began to throw handfuls of earth on him. "Aw, Tommy," said the Scot, "it's a guid thing for you I'm no your dada."

The boy galloped back to the foot of the ladder up which he could see his mother's draggled skirt. "Mammy! Mammy!" he yelled, and beat on the rungs with his fists.

"Little brute," said Mr. Jerrold. He hung his stick on a branch, and the two men worked in agreeable silence, broken only by the soft dropping of fruit into the basket, and now and then, a snatch of jiggy song from the tree where Gunn was perched. The smoke of Mr. Jerrold's cigar hung in fragrant blue wisps among the cherries.

3.

Vale was awakened by the same noise that had disturbed him on his first morning at Grimstone, the boisterous gobble of the turkey-cock. He sat up in bed and through the open window could barely see them as they passed, for it was not yet sunrise. The white hen-turkey came last, uttering little liquid sounds like dropping water.

He remembered his cherries with a pang. Oh, that those

treacherous redskins were safely back at their job! Well, there was Jammery this morning, at any rate. He made up his mind to be out before any of the household. It would be a good thing, he thought, for them to see that he would do everything in his power to prevent waste, and it would be pleasant among the trees before the sun was up. He drew on a thin jersey and a pair of old duck trousers.

The bees were already humming in the tops of the locust trees. A pale saffron streak lay between lake and sky. A faint half-moon behind the orchard was casting her last, timid gaze upon the world.

He went to the apple-house and got some empty baskets, then entered the regular rows of the cherry orchard. Besides numerous ladders there were several tall wooden stands on top of which two people could sit at ease and strip the highest branches. Peering up, he could see Fawnie sitting cross-legged on one of these, her dress dimly blue as the brightening sky, her hair hanging unbound about her shoulders.

"Come on up," she said, softly, leaning towards him, "come and sit alongside o' me. I'll learn you how to pick our way."

He clambered up the rungs and sat beside her, his legs dangling. "This is ripping," he laughed. "I didn't expect anything so exciting."

"Don' you get excited or you'll fall."

He lit a cigarette. "Do you smoke, Fawnie? Will you try one?"

"I take a puff at the ole woman's pipe sometimes when she's not lookin,' but I don' want one o' them."

"Why?"

"It'd be like flirtin', surely." She resumed her cherry-picking with deft fingers.

Vale laughed and began to pick, too. "I was surprised to find you here, Fawnie."

"I wanted to help you, and Jammery said I could. We've been here since the first crack o' day."

"Good girl. I'll do something nice for you."

"What?" She was choosing two pairs of the finest cherries from her basket.

"What would you like?"

She hung the cherries over her ears like scarlet earrings and looked at him. The ruddy shine of the fruit, hardly fresher than her pouting lips; the dark masses of her hair, her slender, coffee-coloured neck, her slanting, humid eyes awoke in Derek the same sensation he had had when he watched her bathe. He experienced an intense consciousness of the earth—mother of him and of all thriving, air-sucking things—men, deer in the forest, trees interlacing their branches in the wind and their roots in the life-giving soil—all driven by the same force, all feeling the same, sharp, sweet urge. . . . He took her in his arms and kissed her quickly on the cheeks and mouth. They clung together till the voice of Newbigging below made them start apart.

"Hoo many hae ye plucked, master?" he said, with a broad grin on his upturned face.

Vale looked down at him sternly. "Get about your work, Newbigging. If I have any cheek from you, you'll go."

He was abashed, mortified at being caught in such a position. He fancied the jests that would pass among the men. He stared, red-faced, at his dangling boots for a space, and then muttered, sulkily—

"You're a little baggage, Fawnie."

She smiled at him from under her lashes. "You mean I act like I was white," she said.

CHAPTER VII

The Folly of Solomon

1.

"They're goin' to flit again," said Newbigging.

"The Indians?" asked Vale.

"Ay. They're leavin' Chaird in the lurch this time. That is, they're all leavin' but the eldest daughter and her husband, and young Fawnie and Jammery. Chaird's fair wild."

"I suppose he'll be after my few Mistwell pickers now."

"He'll never get them. They're insulted because he turned them away for Indians."

"But why are they leaving?"

"It's the auld man—Solomon. He was fiddlin' away at the door of his cottage yesterday when up marched Chaird and told him that the black caps were droppin' off the bushes. 'Let 'em drop,' says Solomon. 'The spirit's on me to fiddle and I've got to fiddle though every berry in the country rots.' Chaird said he would not have an Indian on his farm who would not pick every day and all day. Solomon said that was all very well for squaws, but he was a chief and a gentleman and old Mr. Vale had always treated him as such. This morning he and his family are all packed up ready to go to Reuben MacNeil who grows hops as well as fruit, so auld Solomon says he'll 'make plenty money' there. It sairves Chaird right, and nobody's sorry for him."

Derek, however, could not help feeling sorry for Chard. He had experienced so much anxiety himself over his

cherries and raspberries and had lost such a considerable portion of the crop through lack of pickers, that, though Chard had been the cause of his troubles, he felt himself better able to bear the loss than a man with a family of young children. He had heard, too, that Mrs. Chard worked slavishly between her periods of child-bearing, and now there would be still more to do.

He felt disgusted with the Indians. They were like naughty children. Yet they were infinitely more efficient as pickers than the women and boys of Mistwell. He could see some of the boys now scuffling among the black caps, probably trampling them. He told Newbigging to go and make order among them, and himself went to inspect the raspberries. They were almost over, and gentle little Mrs. Orde was cleaning up the last of them, handicapped, as usual, by her greedy son.

He strolled among the canes, the new growth as high as his shoulder, the last, sun-warmed berries smelling strangely sweet, like violets. Some milkweed had come up among them and, here and there, a bursting pod scattered its shimmering fluff. He found the nest of a yellow warbler dangling, light and dried, from a curving cane. It seemed abnormally deep and when he pulled it apart to examine it he discovered a tiny separate compartment in the bottom almost filled by a large, whitish egg and a very small blue one.

"Look here, Fawnie," he called, for he saw her wandering among the canes a short way off. She came slowly, picking raspberries and poking them into her childish mouth. "I'm gettin' my breakfas' off your berry patch," she said. "I'm mad at everybody and I won' eat with them."

"What made you mad, Fawnie?"

"The ole man. He wants me to go pickin' hops and I won't. I got my hen and chickens to look after, and Jam-

mery and me's goin' to pick thimbleberries for you. . . . What's that you' got?"

He showed her the strange nest.

She chuckled. "Oh, don' you know what that's for, Durek? Gosh, them little birds are sly! I'll tell you now. They built their nice little nest, and the little squaw-bird, she laid a pretty blue egg in it, then she flew away to eat a strawberry and rest a while before she laid some more. When she got back her ole man was perched on the side of the nest, scratchin' his head and lookin' awful mad. 'Come here missus,' he says, 'and jus' see what some darned cow-bird's did. Laid her egg alongside what's goin' to be our little papoose.' She hurried up to see if he was lyin', 'cos he often lied to her. But this time, sure enough, he was tellin' the truth. She swore pretty fierce and pecked him 'cos he hadn't guarded her egg better. Then they both set to work and built a new bottom to the nest, right on top of the cowbird's egg, and then she laid some more eggs and hatched 'em out but the cowbird's egg got cold and died—and so did her first poor little egg lyin' there beside it. But the ole man thought, 'Oh, well, I don' care—it's one less to feed'." She smiled roguishly and shrugged her plump shoulders. "You like that story? Yes? Well, kiss me then."

"I like your story, but your cheeks are berry-stained and if I kissed you everyone would know. The stains are purple. Have you been trying the thimbleberries? You'll be sick, Fawnie, they're not ripe."

"Yes, they're gettin' ripe fast—millions of them. Oh, I forgot, Durek, my paw wants to see you. He's waitin' by the shack. Come along."

"Do you think he's coming back to pick for me?" asked Derek, hopefully, as they passed the thimbleberry canes

whose purple clusters of fruit were becoming dark and shiny.

"No. He's goin' to MacNeil's to pick hops. But he wants to see you first."

They found Solomon Sharroe sitting on the edge of the long table beneath the apple trees. His wife inside the shack was making a bundle of some bedding. Fawnie's hen with her lusty, fluttering brood about her, was scratching in the doorway. Solomon greeted Derek with a dignified inclination of his iron-grey head.

"Mr. Vale," he said, "I am goin' to leave Chard today and take all my family except Esther and her husband, and Jammery."

"And me, paw!" cried Fawnie. "I'm goin' to stay."

"You're goin' to stay," repeated Solomon, with a scornful gesture of his dark hand. "Nobody cares what you're goin' to do because you're so lazy. Even Beulah who is four years younger picks faster than you. Yet when the hot bread and the ham and the pickles are put on the table, you are the first one to sit down and eat all you kin." He turned to Derek with a sombre smile. "There is no harm in her, but she was made for play. The man who marries her will have to pick for the two of them."

"I wish you would come back to me," said Derek, abruptly, his eyes on the vast stretch of his thimbleberry canes, almost threatening in their imminent ripeness. "You know I never interfere with you."

"You are a gentleman," said Solomon, simply, "and I am a chief. I have given my word to Mr. MacNeil that I will take my family to him today, but next season we will come to you and stay till the last Spy ripens, if you need us. . . . Your uncle would have lent me five dollars, for I have done very badly at Chard's. I would repay it next

season and it would make me certain to come. Your uncle knew that a chief is to be trusted."

Derek felt in his pocket. The five dollars was transferred to the hand of Solomon. "The gulls are flying low, and screaming," he said, his eyes raised to the tree-tops. "That means a storm." He muttered a sentence in Indian to the woman who, raising the heavy bundles, followed him meekly through the orchard.

CHAPTER VIII

July Night at Grimstone

1.

*V*ale was lounging on the steps of his porch, alone with his pipe. The night was intensely dark and opulently warm. The lake lay tranquil and dark as though sleeping, touched only by the light on some anchored schooner, and a faint glimmer of star-shine. In the stress of summer work the unused lawn, on the side of the house next Chard's, had been allowed to grow tall and rank. This evening Newbigging had mowed it and he now lay prone upon one of the mounds of moist, sweet-smelling grass. Vale could not see him, but the knowledge that he was there brought a comfortable sense of companionship. Of the four men in the house he liked this reckless, fair-haired Scot best. Windmill was aloof, reticent, often brooding, though his quick smile was pleasant; Gunn was lazy, and sometimes quarrelsome as he expounded his socialistic opinions in the kitchen; while Hugh McKay was always preoccupied with lambs or Phœbe.

Newbigging struck a match and lighted a cigarette. Vale had a fleeting glimpse of his head and shoulders before he settled himself once more. A sudden chill air rose from the lake and enveloped Grimstone like an embrace from the tomb. It seemed to penetrate to the very bone.

"Lord!" exclaimed Newbigging. "D'ye feel that, sir?"

"I've often noticed it at night. It will pass."

It passed. Quickly as it had come, and a tide of warm air rushed in to take its place. The night became sultry.

Across the lake sheet lightning began to play about the horizon.

Derek heard the gate click and he listened for voices or footfalls on the drive. The silence was profound. Then a flash of lightning more vivid than what had gone before discovered a small, white figure but a yard or two away. He rose and went to it.

"Is it you, Fawnie?" he whispered. "Anything wrong?"

She caught his hand in her fingers and drew him away from the house.

"Come and walk with me," she breathed. "I'm lonesome."

He took her hand and led her across the lawn between the tall trunks of the locust and walnut trees that rose like pillars of some dark aisle about them. They crossed the old strawberry bed, now weed-grown, and marked for the plow, and came to the bank of the stream.

He emptied his pipe and dropped it in his pocket. His arm drew her to his side.

"What are you lonely for?"

"You. . . . I want to go out in the canoe."

"In this inky darkness?"

"I like it. It's awful to feel the way I do. Like as if my blood was dancin' in my body. If I could get out in that canoe I'd feel nice and quiet."

"All right," said Derek. He felt suddenly restless himself, and the thought of being in a canoe with Fawnie on the vast darkness of the lake was soothing. "But keep very quiet. Don't speak above a whisper. And keep hold of me. We'll scramble down the bank right here."

She clutched his sleeve, and the two descended the steep bank overgrown with brambles and wild roses. The stream that had gushed so freshly on the night of his arrival at Grimstone, now trickled thinly over the ledges of its chalky

bed. Under the bridge it had formed a dark pool and there the canoe was tied. While Derek unlocked the chain that secured it the slender girl crept in and knelt in the bow. He handed her a paddle and dropped down behind her.

Under the low bridge it was profoundly dark. The moist, velvety air seemed to envelop them; to press down upon them; even to support them, as upon a sombrous cloud. The silence was scarcely disturbed by the delicate ripple of the stream as it crept languidly across the beach and entered the lake.

Vale, taking up his paddle, said:

"Are you lonesome now, Fawnie? Is this dark enough for you?"

Her voice answered out of the blackness—"I am not lonesome—but I'm listening."

"Listening. What do you think you hear?"

"Footsteps."

"Footsteps!" he murmured. "Where? On the bridge?"

"No . . . down the road . . . a lot o' them. Listen hard. Don't you hear?"

"Not a sound. They must be your people."

"No . . . men marching."

As he strained to listen a sudden burst of music broke forth but a few hundred yards away—the cheerful, brazen music of a band. The arch of silence above them was thrown into fragments like a shattered bowl. With every heartbeat the music grew louder, more penetrating.

"I know," she said. "It's the band from Mistwell. They march up to Jerrold's once every summer—in July—that's where they're marchin' now. Mr. Jerrold he gives them lemonade and sandwiches and cake and—twenty-five dollars—every blessed year. The horns frighten me."

The bandsmen were now ascending the slope to the

bridge. The wild music of the horns was deafening; the beating of the great drum was just above their heads; the bridge vibrated beneath the tramp of feet. There must have been many hangers-on from Mistwell following. A blaze of light from torches fell upon the stream, and glittered on the sticky leaves of the Balm of Gilead trees that overhung it. The darkness was driven back, receding up the stream and under the bridge where Derek and Fawnie were hiding. They seemed to be under a whirlpool of strident music and leaping light. She stretched her hand back to his and clasped his fingers. The band descended the opposite slope; the blaze of the torches was withdrawn as abruptly as it had appeared, and now fell in waning blotches on the field of ripened grain beyond the bridge. Gradually the sound of the horns became less strident, then was softened by distance into a plaintive reiteration of a few notes. Fawnie uttered a deep sigh. Once more darkness enfolded them.

Derek dipped his paddle. . . .

"Which way?" he asked, as the canoe slipped into the lake.

The only light visible was a calm, pale beam from the Mistwell lighthouse.

"Away from that light," she whispered.

Derek turned the canoe in the direction of the unseen cliffs that rose before Durras. Fitful lightning, now and then, played upon their sides and showed him where he was. No sound broke the stillness now but the delicate drip of water from their paddles.

It seemed to the young man that a long time passed, and still she did not speak. A glimmer of lightning showed him her upright, slender body with bared arms using her paddle with short, quick Indian strokes. What were her thoughts, he wondered. Where was she leading him? He

felt an immense curiosity aroused by this half-civilized girl —creature of masterful emotions, in her element where there was darkness and storm.

"Where are we going?" he asked, at last, and ceased to paddle.

A pinkish light hung tremulously between sky and lake. It made rosy for a second the face of the low cliff above them. It made rosy the ripply sand of the little sheltered cove hardly more than a paddle's length away.

"I know this place," she said. "Let us rest here for a little."

She turned the bow of the canoe toward the shore. It grounded with a soft jar. Derek, without a word, leaped to the sand and drew the little craft to security after him. The two stood in silence for a moment enveloped in the languorous darkness. . . . "Fawnie!" he cried low.

He felt her soft mouth under his; he was overcome by a sort of giddiness, and, at the same time filled by an immense compassion for her. . . .

2.

They parted on the driveway, she going towards the orchard and he crossing the wet lawn. As her hand was withdrawn from his, it crossed his mind that during all this time he had never once seen her face.

He was about to enter the house when he remembered Newbigging, whom he had left lying on the mound of freshly-cut grass. He went to it and discovered the Scot heavily sleeping.

"Newbigging!" he said, shaking him, "Do you want to get your death of cold?"

Newbigging sat up, rubbing his eyes like a drowsy child. Derek felt his shirt.

"Good Lord, man! You're wet through. Get up!"

"That'll no hurt me," said Newbigging, stretching. "I like sleepin' in the open."

"Just the same, I think you should have a drop of something to warm you."

"Weel—it micht be safer."

They went around to the side and quietly entered the dining room. From the cupboard beneath the stairs Derek got a bottle of Canadian Rye and poured Newbigging a glass.

"Your health and very good fortune, sir." He stood with one hand on the back of a chair while he drank, then carefully set the empty glass on the table.

"Mr. Vale," he said, with his bright, blue eyes on Derek's face, "if it wasn't for a few things—why—life wouldn't be worth livin'."

CHAPTER IX

Solomon in His Glory

1.

September was waning; the thimbleberries had been picked, Vale scarcely knew how. Mrs. Orde and the other village women and boys had been faithful, and Jammery and Fawnie picked from dawn to dark, but there had been times when they could not keep up to the bountiful crop, and over-ripe shipments had been sent down at the railway station that had oozed juice in a purple stream straight across the platform.

Now mellow pears hung in proud fruition. Every now and again one would drop with a soft thump on the golden stubble beneath the pear trees to be instantly pierced by the voracious beak of some attentive fowl. Mounds of red and green and yellow apples were piled beneath the orchard trees. The men worked all day packing barrels for shipping. A large portion were to be stored in the apple-house for winter use, and to sell as prices rose. The defective were stored in the barn for the stock, and, last of all, the pigs would be turned into the orchard to clean up the ground for themselves.

It was a happy time at Grimstone; rough jokes were shouted from tree to tree, Old Country songs were sung as the tops were hammered into barrels, even Mrs. Machin relaxed and carried a brimming jug of cider to the thirsty men, Phœbe's blue dress gleamed bright as a bit of the sky among the branches of a Greasy Pippin tree.

Grace Jerrold had been home for a month. The tennis

court was in fairly good condition and, almost every day, she came over for a game. Mr. Jerrold was too heavy to play, but sometimes Mr. Ramsey accompanied her, and when Vale was busy, the Vicar and she would play together.

This morning she and Vale were opponents. It was a calm, fair day of perfect peace. The gulls sailed idly above the lake, bright, angelic creatures sporting for pleasure in the lustrous ether. A large, white yacht lay becalmed with sails collapsed; they could see the figures of people aboard her moving about her deck. In the distance a steamer with scarlet funnels was heading towards Niagara.

It was delightful on such a morning to run and leap after the ball over the closely shaven lawn. The delicate foliage of the walnut trees cast a light shade on the court; sometimes a walnut in its smooth, green burr, smelling like bergamot, would fall noiselessly on the grass.

"Oh, I don't think I have ever enjoyed a game so much!" cried Grace Jerrold, as they rested after a hard-fought contest.

"And yet you were beaten," said Derek.

"Still, I almost won, and, after all, it's the good fight that counts."

He looked into her fair, flushed face, curiously. "Are you that way about the big things—in life I mean?"

"Yes, I think I am. Father is like that, too. He has often played a losing game, but his spirits are always good."

"I believe if things went very wrong with me I should turn sulky and give up trying."

Miss Jerrold laughed, and then looked seriously into his candid, greenish-blue eyes. "I don't see you being unhappy," she said. "Your eyes seem to me to be looking straight into a golden future."

"They're looking straight at you."

"Oh, I'm afraid I cannot do much towards your happiness."

"You do a great deal simply by coming over to play tennis with me."

"Then we had better begin another game and not lose any time." She picked up a walnut on her racquet and tossed it to him.

He caught it on his and then took it in his hand. "It smells sweet and yet sharp," he said, sniffing it. "Is it like bergamot, or what?" He held it to her nose—a beautiful little nose, he thought, with its slender nostrils and delicate aquilinity—made for sweet smells, and the expression of slightly amused scorn. "It is like lemons, and verbena, and a half-a-dozen elusive odors," she declared. He dropped it on his jacket that lay on the grass. "I'm going to keep it," he said.

"But you have thousands of them." She looked up into the trees.

"None like this."

"Because I sniffed it?"

"Yes."

"If you are so silly I shall spend my morning sniffling walnuts all over the place. Then you'll have to save them all."

"I certainly shall. I'll throw the apples out of the apple-house and store all the nuts you have sniffed in there. Then I shall spend my winter in the middle of them like a luxurious squirrel."

She crossed the court laughing, but as she raised her arm to serve, the smile left her face and she stared with a puzzled look at the road. Derek's eyes followed hers. "There is something wrong with that old man on the waggon," she said. "Look. The other man is holding him up."

"Why, it is Solomon Sharroe," exclaimed Vale. "He must be sick. I shall go and investigate."

Grace Jerrold followed him, and the two were filled with pity by the plight of the old man. He was sitting on the narrow, uncomfortable seat of a light fruit-waggon, his head resting weakly on the shoulder of the sullen youth who held the reins. His hollow eyes stared blankly before him; his dark hands were clasped resignedly between his bony knees.

"What is wrong with him?" Derek asked of the boy.

"I dunno. He ain't been much good fer a week, but he got took worse last night and Muster McNeil waount have him dyin' on him, so I've brung him back to Chard's where he come from."

"Where is his family?"

"Comin' by tram."

"Mr. McNeil has a comfortable buggy," cried Grace. "Why did he send him in this wretched waggon?"

The youth grinned. "He thought it was good enough fer an Injun, I s'pose."

"Oh, the brute! I shall have my father write him a letter. We must get a doctor at once."

"Where do you feel the worst, Solomon?" asked Derek, raising his voice.

"My spirit," he answered, in a surprisingly strong voice. "My spirit . . . is broke. . . . You are a gentleman and I am a chief . . . you understand. Now about that five dollars . . . I have done very badly at McNeil's. He treated me like a dog . . . "

"Never mind about the money. I am going to send for a doctor for you. Have you any special pain? Would you take a little brandy?"

"Yes, I would. You get me a little in a bottle and my

old woman will fix me a dose when I need it. McNeil he give me just one mouthful before I left."

Derek ran to the house and brought a flask. When he had taken a drink Solomon put the flask carefully in his pocket and turned his eyes, filled with a sombre brightness, on Derek and Miss Jerrold. He said solemnly:

"You are a gentleman, Mr. Vale, and you know what becomes a chief. When I get better I will tell you tales of the old days—not so long ago, either—when my people owned all this—" he extended his arm in a noble gesture over lake and land. "That was before you drove us back as the waves wash away those dark red cliffs. I will tell you tales my grandfather taught me—yes, and you, too, young lady—that will make your hair rise." He showed his yellow teeth in a ghastly smile. "We didn't go picking berries then, by God! . . . No, we didn't go picking berries. Ho, ho, ho!"

He laughed deeply, and would have fallen from his seat but that the boy clutched him and, at a nod from Derek, drove on.

"What he says is true," said Grace, soberly. "We have taken their land, and civilization demoralizes them."

"Yes, but we have made a better land of it, and I think they are better employed picking berries than scalping each other."

"I should like to hear some of his tales."

"I'm afraid he won't live to tell them. I shall send for a doctor right away, and have Mrs. Machin pack a basket of groceries for his family."

"Our men have killed a calf today. I shall send them some veal and some eggs."

"Never mind the eggs," said Derek. "They can steal them from Chard."

2.

The butter had just come after a long churning. Beads of perspiration glistened on Phœbe's rosy face and little strands of hair curled damply on her forehead. Derek had come to the kitchen for a drink of buttermilk. She got a glass from the dresser and filled it to the brim.

"Look at the bits of yellow butter floatin' about," she said, "that's what I call good buttermilk."

"Splendid," said Derek, taking a draught. "You're a fine butter-maker, Phœbe."

"If I wasn't, Mrs. Machin'd take my head off. She's an old terror, she is. This'ud be a pretty hard place for a gal if it wasn't for the lads."

"Come now, Phœbe, you have an easy time of it. I see you playing about by the hour."

She tossed her head. "Aye, but think of the work I've done before I play! I wouldn't think you'd be so hard on me, Mr. Vale."

"Hard on you, Phœbe? No . . . I like you too well. You're a good girl."

She came close to him, and tilted her chin. "Will you untie the knot in my sunbonnet? It's fallen down my back, and the knot's fair chokin' me." He set down his empty glass and fumbled with the knot against her milk-white, softly throbbing throat. "Oh, I couldn't deny you anything, Mr. Vale," she panted, "not if it was ever so."

"Well," he said, cheerfully, loosening the knot, "give me another glass of buttermilk, then, unless you're saving it for Hughie."

"Hughie!" Scornfully. "What do I care about Hughie, when you're by?" She turned the tap of the churn and refilled his glass. There was a soft knocking on the screen door. Beulah's round face was pressed against the netting.

"Say, Phœbe," she said, solemnly, "the ole man's dead."

"What, Solomon?"

"Yes. My paw. He died a little while ago. We're goin' to have a funerl."

"I'm sorry," said Derek. "The doctor told me yesterday he might get better."

"Well, he ain't. He couldn't be worse. He's as dead as the blackbird Mr. Chard nailed to his barndoor. We're goin' to have a funerl with a minister. Paw's other wife's comin' too."

"Good Lord! Has he got another wife?"

Beulah grinned. "He had her before he had Maw, but she was no good so he fired her. But she's comin' to his funerl. . . . Miss Jerrold sent a lot of things. Phœbe, kin I have a point of milk?"

"Buttermilk?"

"No. Real milk."

"Where's your money?"

"I'll pay you after the funerl, Phœbe."

"Give her the milk," said Vale, curtly. He was shocked by the child's callousness. "Aren't you sorry he is dead, Beulah?"

"Yes. He was a great chief. Mrs. Chard she's makin' a purty thing out of flowers for his grave. Gates of Jar, she calls it. Are you comin' to the funerl?" . . .

All the next day there was a feeling of excitement in the air. Phœbe spent most of the morning peering through the picket fence that separated the yards. She reported stirring events. Indians were arriving from all directions. A large table was being laid for a feast under the apple trees. She had squeezed through a gap in the fence, and seen with her own eyes The Gates of Jar . . . it was unaccountably lovely. She had not seen Solomon himself, but one of the Chard boys had told her that he was all got up in war paint and feathers. Phœbe scarcely knew whether to believe this

but, if it were true, he must be terrible. . . . They said he died hard.

Mrs. Machin thought it would be only the respectable thing for herself, attended by one of the men, to go to the funeral. Windmill accompanied her, carrying his bowler hat in his hand, and trying to conceal his amusement by a frown.

The funeral was at three o'clock. It was a hazy, languid day of yellow sunshine and smoky horizon. As the hour drew near the three Scots and Phœbe gathered in the cherry orchard behind the kitchen garden from whence they could view the ceremony. Derek did not know whether to join them or not. As he was standing undecidedly in the porch Mr. Jerrold, his daughter, and Mr. Ramsey came down the road. They turned in at the gate followed by their dogs.

"Are we too late to see the ceremony?" asked Mr. Jerrold. "Gay has never seen an Indian funeral and she's determined not to miss the opportunity."

"From what I hear," said Derek, "it is to be very civilized. No savage rites for Chard. He has a minister from Mistwell who is to bring an autoharp."

"I think that's a splendid idea," said Mr. Ramsey. "I must get one."

"Oh, we shouldn't make fun of the Chards," said Grace Jerrold. "Mrs. Chard is a very good woman and very sincere in her religion."

"Lead on, Vale," interrupted her father. "I want to see the show."

They found an open space near Phœbe and the men, from which they could watch the proceedings almost unobserved. The body of Solomon in its cheap coffin had been carried from the cottage and placed on a pair of trestles near the table spread for the feast. About fifty Indians

were seated in a half-circle on the ground, except a few of the older ones for whom chairs had been placed. Chief among these was the former wife, an enormously fat squaw in a bright green skirt and red shawl. Her brown hands were crossed complacently on her stomach, and there was about her an air of stoical triumph. Two elderly Indians in check shirts and black trousers sat on either side of her. Near by, wearing a clean white apron over her torn skirt, sat Solomon's present wife. She wiped her face continually with a red and white handkerchief and gazed with sorrowful eyes at the floral Gates Ajar that Mrs. Chard had placed upon the coffin. Around her were grouped her family—the little girls and idiot boy at her feet, her daughters and their husbands holding moon-faced babies behind her. A little aloof stood Fawnie and her nineteen-year-old brother Charles, the young fellow dapper in city clothes with a straw sailor, a bow tie, and polished shoes with broad ribbon laces. Bobby, the boy whom Derek had first seen bathing with his sisters, had refused to join the mourners and had mounted a large swing beneath an elm tree, and there swung lazily to and fro, his handsome, inscrutable face turned towards the officiating minister.

"I like the boy in the swing," whispered Grace Jerrold to Derek. "He strikes a really barbaric note."

"To me," said Derek, "the minister is the one barbaric thing present."

He was a lank man with a damp black lock pendant over his forehead. He wore a black frock coat, a turn-down collar, and striped trousers. On a small table before him lay his autoharp; he held a Bible in one hand, while the index finger of the other stabbed dramatically at its open pages as he spoke. Behind him were ranged the Chard family, large-bosomed Mrs. Chard in respectable black, grasping a tow-headed child in either hand. With them

stood Mrs. Machin and Windmill, her hand resting on his arm, he jauntily holding his bowler hat. Overhead the inquisitive gulls swept with glistening wings, peering down at the mysterious conclave.

When the minister had finished his discourse he announced the number of a hymn. Vale then perceived that all present had been supplied with small red hymn books. Solomon's former wife was so heavy that she had to be raised to her feet by the united strength of the elderly men in check shirts. As she rose a lunch that she had been holding in her lap rolled to the ground, the red handkerchief in which it was wrapped fell open, and the idiot boy seeing the food, like manna, at his very hand, snatched a cold sausage and a piece of cheese, and scuttled to the shelter of his mother's skirt with them. None of the Indians could read, but they stared at their books with solemn attention. The minister struck a few tinkling notes on the autoharp and raised his nasal tenor voice. The Chards and Windmill supported him so sturdily that the air swelled to a considerable volumn. Like a metallic thread the voice of the autoharp persisted thinly from first to last. The spectators in the cherry orchard could distinguish some words of the refrain:

"I'll stand by until the morrow,
"I've come to save you do not fe-ar;
"I'll stand by until the mor-row,
"I've come to save you do not fear."

The minister's voice rose with a swoop of indescribable anguish on the first "fear." A guffaw burst from the three Scots, silenced only by a frown from Derek. The boy in the swing, wrought upon by the sensuousness of the scene, bent and straightened his body vigourously so that he

swung in great semicircles under the elm, now up among its branches, now skimming above the ground.

When the hymn was finished the little red books were collected by the eldest Chard boy, and returned to the minister, who stood mopping his brow with a white handkerchief. The Indians arranged themselves in single file and began slowly to pass the coffin to take their last look on the face of Solomon, upturned, with sunken eyes and cheeks, and a smile of bitter composure. His wife came last, and bent for a moment to press her round wet face against his cold one. Then a loud wail broke from her and she clutched him by the shoulders and tried to drag him from the coffin. Moans of sympathy came from the other squaws, excepting Solomon's other wife, who stared at her successor with the ponderous contempt of a mountain for a brawling stream.

The coffin was hidden by a surging crowd. The minister carefully laid his autoharp in its case. Chard was very busy giving orders; then the coffin reappeared borne on the shoulders of six men. A wavering procession was formed, brightened by the gay colours of the women's shawls and the flowery hats of the girls. Jammery carried the Gates Ajar. They were now bound for the little graveyard.

A cry of anger burst from Phœbe. "Let loose, now, Hughie—this minute," she was saying.

"What are you up to, Hugh?" asked Derek, reproachfully, with a glance towards Mr. Ramsey.

"He's been and took my spectacles," cried Phœbe, "and I couldn't see the percession at all. He's an unnatural lover, if ever there was one."

"Give them back to her," ordered Derek, and Hugh sheepishly handed them over.

"Rose-coloured spectacles, I am sure," said Mr. Ramsey, airily.

"I'm watching that young boy," said Mr. Jerrold. "He has never left his swing. What do you suppose he is thinking?"

The procession had disappeared, but the boy hung motionless as a snake on the ropes of the swing which barely stirred beneath him.

"Mischief, I'll be bound," said the Vicar.

3.

They strolled through the apple-orchard, examining the quality of the fruit. Grace Jerrold paused before a mound of Tolman Sweets. "Oh, may I have a few of these to take home? There is nothing I like so well, and we haven't one."

"I shall send a basket to you," said Vale. He selected one of the finest and handed it to her. As she bit into it their eyes met; they smiled. Suddenly they seemed to be alone in the orchard. "With that golden apple at your lips, and the golden light on your hair, you are exactly like Eve," whispered Derek.

She laughed and he could see the white bit of apple in her mouth.

"This Spy is delicious," said her father, crunching it like a schoolboy.

"I am hungry," said Mr. Ramsey, "but it seems to be tea I want."

"Look here," said Derek, "you must all stay and have tea with me. I'll go and tell Mrs. Machin." He felt a little nervous as he hurried towards the house. He had not entertained guests at Grimstone before and he was afraid Mrs. Machin's way of doing things might seem a little rough.

Mrs. Machin did not take the announcement amiss. Excitement was in the air; half the day was wasted; one

might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. She would make little sweet muffins and butter them well while hot. "Make plenty of tea," said Derek. "Mr. Ramsey can drink a potful."

"He's got a thirst for more than tea from what I hear," said Mrs. Machin. "They say he can swig down beer with the best of 'em at The Duke of York."

"Oh, Mrs. Machin!" cried Phœbe, shocked.

"You get busy and cut some bread," ordered Mrs. Machin.

"And for heaven's sake, cut it thin!" said Vale. . . .

Tea was a distinct success. The Vicar found the muffins excellent. He sent a message of praise by Phœbe to Mrs. Machin. Phœbe, pink-cheeked and white-aproned, bore herself admirably. Grace Jerrold admired the homely dignity of the old-fashioned room. As she poured tea into his grandmother's dark blue cups, Derek thought, "How thoroughly at home she looks . . . as if she belonged here . . . and the turn of her wrist above the tea-pot . . ." He asked for another cup of tea just for the pleasure of seeing her pour it.

"Some of those young Indian girls are lovely," Mr. Jerrold was saying. "Hobbs caught one of them in my woods the other day with a rabbit she had just killed. She'd set a trap for it. He brought her to me, rabbit and all, for a lecture, but she was so confoundedly pretty I couldn't be cross to her. She said her name was Fawnie—Fawnie Sharroe. Have you noticed her, Vale?"

"Yes," answered Derek, stirring his tea. "I've noticed her."

CHAPTER X

Christmas at Grimstone

1.

Edmund wrote that he had got leave from his regiment, The Royal Canadians, and would spend Christmas with Derek. They had never been separated for so long before and Derek counted the days till he should meet him at the station with his new red sleigh and black bear robes. But winter seemed loath to descend from the low grey skies or to set his foot sharply on the quiescent earth. November was hazy and warm; December was like Indian Summer; on Christmas Eve there had not been a fleck of snow. Derek, in disgust, ordered Gunn to wash the muddy trap, and scrub the bay gelding's sides, for he had seen fit to roll on the muddy bank of the stream.

It seemed that train-time would never come. He looked at his watch every five minutes; he went upstairs twice to inspect Edmund's room. He even wound the grandfather clock in the hope that he might hurry Time along.

At last Gunn's rosy face appeared in the door. "Hadn't we better be gettin' along, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," said Derek, "it must be time."

He and Gunn got into the cart and Phœbe ran ahead to open the gate. Jock snapped at the gelding's legs, and circled the trap with exasperating yelps. They sped quickly along the hard road, for now it seemed that after all the waiting they were a little late. As they passed the graveyard they saw Solomon Sharroe's grave surmounted by the skeleton of the Gates Ajar, a few dead leaves clinging to

the wire frame. The pier at Mistwell was white with gulls, basking in the sun. Before they reached the station they heard the train whistle at a crossing.

Derek drove the horse behind the station and gave the reins to Gunn just as the roar of the locomotive subsided to a hiss. He hurried along the platform looking eagerly for his brother. Edmund alighted from the last coach, followed by a porter with his travelling-bag.

"I've got a trunk somewhere," he said, after they had shaken hands.

"I'll give the check to the 'bus driver and he can bring it later. My trap is behind the station. Jove, you look well!"

"So do you. I expected you to meet me on a load of hay, wearing a coon coat. You're far too swell for a farmer."

Derek felt boyishly happy as they rolled briskly along towards Grimstone. It was good to have Edmund with him; he had scarcely realized how fond he was of him; he wished Gunn were not behind so they might be quite alone. He fired rapid questions at him about friends in Halifax. Edmund told him the latest jokes of his regiment, and he laughed uproariously. As they neared Grimstone he looked anxiously at his brother to see what effect the place would have on him.

"Nice old house, but rather bleak," was the verdict.

"You should see it in summer. Isn't that a great view?"

"Fine. Where do the Jerrolds live?"

"Over there. You can't see the house. She's a lovely girl, Ted, bronzy hair, and eyes almost violet. . . . There's my barn and stables. If it isn't too dark after tea we'll go and have a look at the stock. Have a beautiful filly."

"Is she at home now?"

"At home? Oh, yes, she's not broken in yet."

"Good heavens! I meant Miss Jerrold."

Derek heard Gunn snigger. He looked at him sternly as they alighted at the door. He felt that some day he should cuff Gunn's ears.

2.

Edmund Vale was a year younger than Derek, slenderer, more supple, and not so tall. They bore a brotherly resemblance, but their eyes were so different that the difference was more pronounced than the resemblance. Derek's, wide-open, nearer green than blue, were expectant, confident, mirthful; Edmund's, velvety brown with a slightly oblique slant, were questioning rather than expectant, pleading rather than confident, malicious rather than mirthful. His lips were pouting, and when he smiled, as he did readily, he showed excellent white teeth.

He was immensely amused by Derek's situation at Grimstone; he chaffed him about the number of his "retainers" and the beauty of his "handmaidens." It was easy to see that he had at once slipped into the good graces of Mrs. Machin. When she and Derek were alone for a moment she said that she could not see for the life of her what his uncle had had against Edmund. For her part she thought him a fine young man that any uncle might be proud to make his heir.

They had a hearty meal, and it was pleasant indeed to Derek to have someone to talk and laugh with, over his food, after eating so long by himself. After the meal it was still light enough for a casual inspection of the stock and farm. They filled their pockets with apples for the horses, and Edmund could hardly tear himself away from the two Welsh ponies who, like forward children, pushed and jostled each other and their new friend in their desire to be fed and petted. In fact he seemed more interested

in them than in the skittish filly, or the two "drivers," or the broad-backed farm horses. When Derek took him to the cow-stable he had little enough to say about the two fine Holstein cows that had been purchased in the autumn to mate with the young son of Gretta van Lowe. Yet he hung fascinated over the calf-pen to watch Phœbe feed twin Jersey calves, late comers in the season, her arm rising, round and white, from the warm, sickly-smelling milk, her face flushed with exertion as she cuffed back the other twin.

"Hello," said Derek, sharply, "you dropped a cigarette stub. If you were a hired man I'd fire you." He put his foot on the smouldering spark.

"Mr. Vale's awful partic'ler about cigarette stubs," said Phœbe, drawing her hand from the clinging mouth of the calf. "He nearly sacked Bob Gunn for dropping one once."

"Very well," said Edmund, petulantly, "if I can't drop a few cigarette stubs about the place, I'd better go home, eh Phœbe?"

"Come along," said Derek, "you scarcely saw the bull. Then there are the pigs and sheep and poultry."

The turkeys had got into the poultry house and were resting on the highest perch, pecking the heads of the unhappy fowls beneath, so that most of the hens had huddled together in a corner on the floor, while the cocks with ruffled plumage strode up and down before the perches, longing but not daring to attack the intruders. Derek began to throw the turkeys out over the half-door. With heavy beating of wings they alit in the barnyard and, with scornful dignity, walked unhurriedly to the rail fence where they were supposed to perch.

"Why do they want to be in here?" asked Edmund, cautiously grasping the white hen-turkey.

"Pure cussedness. They know the fowls hate them,

and they know we'll throw them out if we catch them, yet they persist."

"Perhaps they're cold."

"Not a bit. Feel the depth of that plumage." He plunged his hand into the downy whiteness of her breast. She drew her head back sharply, uttering a strange hissing noise, and staring into his mouth with her wild black eyes.

"She'd like to peck out one of my teeth. Put your hand on her neck."

"She's lovely. Like a graceful, pale woman. She's afraid, poor thing. I'll send her after the others." He dropped her lightly over the half-door, and they watched her as she delicately walked into the dusk, trailing her long feet.

"She's absolutely useless," said Derek. "She should have been eaten for Christmas. She set twice last summer and didn't hatch a poult. But she's so damned decorative—" He closed the door and bolted it, and they turned to go. Their feet scuffled the deep, clean straw; the perches were full of gentle, puffed-out hens, with here and there the toothed comb of a cock rising watchfully. On the lowest perch a row of immaculately white Wyandotte pullets pressed shoulder to plump shoulder. The air, smelling of straw and feathers, was full of comfortable, sleepy twitterings and cluckings, sometimes broken by a complaining note as some greedy perch fellow pressed too close against another.

They passed between the dim rows of cows, gently clanking their chains as they stooped for cut hay and chop, and came upon Hugh McKay putting mangolds through the pulping machine. Behind him the blackness of the root cellar yawned like a cave, but his strong body and swinging arms were illuminated by the red glow of a lantern that hung from a rafter above. His shirt was thrown open and the curly hairs on his broad breast glistened in the light.

The machine gave forth a crunching, pulpy sound as it disgorged the cut-up mangolds that lay in a juicy mound on the floor, white, rosy pink, and purple. The nearest cow stretched her neck towards it, protruding her tongue, and rolling her liquid, dark eyes.

As they went up the stairs Derek said to his brother: "That fellow, Hugh, is sweet on Phœbe, the girl who was feeding the calves."

"He is a fine-looking fellow. Looks as though he would be a good worker."

"He is. He has only two interests in life—the farm, and Phœbe. I wish you could see her dance. She used to be a hop-picker in the Old Country."

It had grown dark outside. "It is too late to see anything more tonight," said Derek. "Tomorrow morning I shall take you all over the place. We are to have dinner with the Jerrolds at two, and in the evening I'm giving a party for the 'help.' Phœbe's been begging for one for a month and I thought we might as well have it while you are here."

"By George, I shall dance with Phœbe!"

"Not too often or you will have Hugh after you."

"Are they engaged?"

"I expect so, but he's far too good for her. She's not to be trusted."

"Where is the woman who is?" exclaimed Edmund, cynically.

3.

For the first time since he had come to the farm Derek had a lamp lighted in the drawing-room. Edmund sat down at the old square piano and played with lightness and vigour popular music, and some of Derek's favourites from the operas; Derek lounged on the brocaded sofa and

smoked, while the eyes of those who had built and cherished Grimstone looked soberly down from the walls.

In a pause of the music Derek said: "Oh, I say, Edmund, I have a Christmas present for you. Shall I give it to you now or shall you wait till tomorrow?"

Edmund swung around on the stool and faced him. "I think I'll wait. I have something for you too. Only a trifle. Not at all what I should have liked, but you know how it is with me. I'm always hard up."

"Oh, that's all right. How would you like a game of cribbage? I should like to give you a good licking before you go."

"All right. The piano is out of tune but it has a nice tone. Better get it tuned before it's too late."

"For whom?" asked Derek.

"Miss Jerrold, of course. I see her firmly established here as mistress by my next visit."

"Rot. I've no intention of getting married. I like the freedom of my life just as it is. I'm wedded to old Grimstone."

"Well, get the cribbage board, and I'll make you sorry you spoke."

They went to the dining room to play. The doors of the pantry between it and the kitchen were open and their game was frequently interrupted by noisy talk and laughter.

"Deuce take those hoodlums," muttered Derek. "I'll shut the doors."

"Not for a bit. I want to hear them. One of the Scotchmen is reading aloud—something from 'Jack Canuck,' I think. He sounds aggressive."

"He is—in the kitchen. That's Gunn. There; I peg two on you. That's what you get for not attending to the game."

"Whatever are they doing now? Listen."

A hoarse guffaw came from the kitchen. "There goes Newbigging! Ho! ho! ho! There goes Gunn! Gie a blink, Phœbe, and knock Windmill off. There he goes—ho! ho! ho!"

"What are they up to, Derek?"

"Phœbe is sticking apple-seeds to her eyelids. She names each of them for one of the boys, and the one that hangs on longest" . . . .

"Now there's only Hughie and the two chaps in yonder." . . . "Aw, she put a extra dod o' spit on them, ye can be sure." Mrs. Machin spoke. "Sh. They'll hear you." A smothered burst of laughter followed, and a whispered—"There go Hugh and the master! Gosh! There's only Captain Vale left." Mrs. Machin then slammed the door.

"Now, Ted," said Derek, sternly, "are you going to play or are you not?"

Edmund was going to play, and played so well that he won two games, with Derek many points behind. Then supper was laid on the table—good cold beef, cheese, and baked apples, and Derek fetched two bottles of ale from the cupboard beneath the stairs. As they sat down, the party from the kitchen filed past on their way to bed, Phœbe in a state of impending collapse from stifled laughter. She had removed her spectacles for the test of the apple-pips, and, being almost blind without them, she clutched Hughie's sleeve for guidance.

The brothers, left to themselves, grinned at each other across the table.

"This place of yours is a regular picnic," said Edmund. "Tell me, are you always so hilarious? I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I like your old dining room. That china greyhound on the chimney-piece seems a friendly soul, and, even the pictures, though at first glance they seem depressing, are really jolly. I've never seen dying

men look so neat and comfortable as those chaps scattered about Wellington and Blucher. Except perhaps the fellow bent across the cannon. Then that 'Trial of William, Lord Russell'—there's a good, solid air of comfort about it. Yes, I like your house and your stock and, above all, your 'help.' No one could feel blue with Hugh and Phœbe about. I'm awfully glad to find you so comfortable here, Derek."

What a decent fellow Edmund was! Not a hint of envy—of grudging him his good fortune! Derek made up his mind to destroy the cheque he had written for him and to write a more substantial one.

The ale had put an agreeable glow into their veins. They were as light-hearted as schoolboys. Derek told his brother of all his ambitions for Grimstone, and impressed him with the knowledge of farming he had gained in the past months. They went to the kitchen where the collie lay, stretched on his mat beside the cooking stove. Plates of apple-parings on the table reminded them of Phœbe's eyelids and the apple-pips. They laughed, and then suddenly began to scuffle. Around the kitchen they strained and heaved getting more in earnest every moment. At last Derek bent Edmund across the table and, holding his head down, administered some hearty thumps. The collie sprang up and began to bark.

"You blasted idiot, you've hurt me," groaned Edmund. "My hair's full of apple-parings!"

"Be a little soldier," said Derek. "Here, have a drink of cream. I'll wager you've never seen cream like this." He lifted the lid from an earthen crock and showed the bubbly, yellow foam.

Edmund came over, nursing his elbow. "You hurt me," he repeated. "I'm damned if I have another tussle with you. What cream!" He took the cup that Derek gave him, and dipped it. "I wonder if it will hurt me," he said.

"No, but Mrs. Machin will if she finds out; we shall have to wash the cups."

The kitchen clock, with red roses on its dial, struck twelve. "We had better go to bed," said Derek. "I'll get a candle and light you to your room."

"Rot," said Edmund. "I'm going to sleep with you in that big four-poster."

"Good. It will be a regular Christmas Eve. We should hang up our stockings. Do you remember the time" . . . . Remembrances occupied them till they were in bed. They did not draw the blind, and the clear, wintry moonlight flooded the room. They stretched luxuriously side by side on the soft feather bed, their full, firm limbs outlined under the blankets. They lay in drowsy silence breathing the sharp, pure air that came in from the lake.

At last Derek said: "You remember those Indians I had here?"

"Of course."

"There was one young girl . . . she was really lovely . . . just half-civilized, you know . . . and her eyes—like a fawn's. She liked me and I liked her. One couldn't help it. Do you know what I mean? She was more like a tender, timid, audacious little animal than a woman. Only seventeen."

"Tell me about her," said Edmund, turning on his side and putting one arm across his brother.

They lay awake talking for a long time.

4.

Edmund shivered and laughed on Christmas morning as he splashed the icy water from the ewer over his face and neck. From the kitchen came the sound of Phœbe's voice singing "Christians Awake," as she turned the separator. He had been mightily pleased with the cheque Derek had given him impulsively, as soon as they were out of bed, and

Derek had been equally pleased by the old English hunting print brought from Halifax.

The day was fine, and so mild that the bare earth and moist, brown orchard trees seemed to be stretched in but a feline half-sleep and needed only a whisper or a touch to awaken to activity. They spent the morning in visiting every building on the farm. They walked to the wood, followed all the way up the lane by the two Welsh ponies. There the paths were slippery with pine needles; beds of moss dotted with scarlet wintergreen berries looked like diminutive cultivated gardens. They sat on a fallen tree watching the smoke from their cigars wind like a blue veil in and out among the pines. Rabbits and squirrels were about hopping and scampering in the sun. Presently the four men came to cut spruce and hemlock branches to decorate the house for the dance. Mrs. Machin and Phœbe were busy baking cakes and tarts, and decorating freshly-boiled hams with frills of fringed pink tissue paper. Into the fat they pressed many cloves.

At two o'clock the brothers were met at the door of Durras by Mr. Jerrold himself. He took them into the drawing-room where there were already Grace Jerrold, Mr. Ramsey, and a young lady from Brancepeth of whom the Vicar spoke as "my tower of strength in the Chancel Guild." Miss Edna Pearsall was dark-haired, pale, with square, plump jaws, permanent dimples in her cheeks, and glistening grey eyes. The presence of four unattached males exhilarated her pleasantly. She had an especial air for each of them. Towards the Vicar she was at once deferential and mischievous; towards Mr. Jerrold child-like and yet knowing—even naughty; towards Edmund, worldly, richly cultivated; but towards Derek there was a deadly seriousness in her manner that alarmed him. They were seated beside each other at table, and Mr. Ramsey smiled encour-

agingly at them. Edmund, on Grace's right hand, seemed entirely absorbed by her, talking in a low voice, and only joining in the general conversation occasionally. Mr. Jerrold and the Vicar were boisterously happy, praising the juicy turkey and drinking freely of the good wine. Wreaths of holly hung against the pannelled walls; dark pictures reflected the ruddy candle shades.

"How invigorating and cheering is this excellent port!" intoned Mr. Ramsey, as they reached the walnuts and raisins. "There is no drink so healthful, and so calculated to bring out the most amiable qualities in one, as wine, taken in moderation, of course. I deplore the taste for whiskey in our country. It comes, I suppose, from our strongly Scotch ancestry. Now, if our working-classes drank light wines, as the French do, it would be better for them."

"Canadian wines are very poor," said Mr. Jerrold. "The summer is so short, even in the Niagara peninsula, that there is very little natural sugar in the grapes. Probably the soil has something to do with it, too. Consequently we have to sweeten the wine with manufactured sugar, which makes it very indigestible. I think the working man is safer with his glass of whiskey."

"Why not beer? The Americans and English drink beer."

"We are a stubborn Northern race," said Edmund. "Beer is too insipid for us."

"I think if a drink could be invented with a flavour like whiskey but without its evil effect, it would very soon supplant it, don't you, Mr. Vale?" said Miss Pearsall, arranging her fingers about the stem of her wine glass.

Vale's dislike of her was turning to hatred. He had an overwhelming desire to shock her, even if in doing it he dis-

gusted Grace Jerrold. "Just to show what a childish illusion that is," he said in a sulky, muffled voice, "I shall tell you a little story about a hunting party I was once with. There were six of us deer shooting in the North, and we had taken a keg of Scotch with us. The weather was so cold and rainy that it went much faster than we had expected. We could plainly see that the last week there would be nothing to drink. One of the party got an empty bottle and, unknown to the rest of us, filled it from the keg and hid it, so that on the last day when we should be preparing the cabin for the winter, and have a twelve mile walk through the forest ahead of us he might produce this pleasant surprise. The last week was a sterile one, no deer—nothing to drink but prepared coffee. The last morning broke cold and damp. Everyone out of sorts. Then appeared our friend, beaming, with his bottle of Scotch. Now the sad thing was that the empty bottle he had got, though it had a good Scotch label on it, had once been filled with coal oil, and the idiot had never smelled it. Imagine our feelings when we tasted it! Imagine the abuse we heaped on his head!"

"You would just have to throw it out, wouldn't you, Mr. Vale?"

"No. That's the strange part of it. We kept sniffing it and tasting it to see how bad it was till, if you'll believe me, we ended by drinking every drop of it, and by that time we loved the taste of coal oil."

"How horrible!" said Grace Jerrold, on a note of disgust.

"I don't agree with you, Grace," cried Miss Pearsall. "To me there was something fine about those huntsmen. Their single-mindedness, their subduing of the flesh—"

"To the spirits," suggested Mr. Jerrold.

"It seems to me that such a man," she went on, "would be capable of tremendous self-sacrifice for one he loved."

"Dear Edna," said the Vicar, "she has the temperament of the artist. By the way, you young men must hear her sing. She has a lovely soprano voice. . . ."

In the drawing-room after dinner she sang. Like most singers she was easy to start and hard to stop. Grace Jerrold played her accompaniments. She sang, her glistening grey eyes on Derek's face, and a professional's smile deepening the dimples in her cheeks. It irritated Derek to see his brother's supple figure lounging against the piano. Edmund was already more familiar with Grace, he thought, than he who had known her so long. It was the first time he had ever come to Durras when he had not thoroughly enjoyed himself. He wished he had not told that story of the hunting party. He was always doing things he afterwards regretted. Good heavens, couldn't Edmund tear himself away from the piano? He thought of their tussle the night before, and wished he had hurt him more. If they had another. . . .

At last Miss Pearsall ceased singing and a game of billiards was proposed. Mr. Jerrold, Mr. Ramsey, Miss Pearsall, and Derek went upstairs to the billiard-room. The other two said they would follow later; they were going to try over some music. Derek enjoyed the billiards. One could not help enjoying a game with Mr. Jerrold. He threw himself into it with such zest, made such daring, brilliant shots, and was so unconscious of his fine physique and power. Grace and Edmund appeared after a while and remained as spectators.

It was dark, and the tea-things had been taken away when Derek remembered the party at Grimstone. "We shall have to go," he said. "I am giving a dance for Phœbe and the boys to-night and I must see how they get on."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Miss Pearsall. "I should love to see peasants dancing."

"There are fishermen, and farm hands, and berry-pickers,

and servant girls, but there are no peasants that I know of," said Derek, coldly.

"Ah. I love peasants. One always thinks of the Happy Peasant!"

"Why not the Hungry Peasant? Or the Half-hanged Peasant? Or the Hideous Peasant?"

Miss Pearsall gave a little shriek. "How brutal you are! Is your brother always so cruel, Captain Vale? But indeed, I have no repartee. All I can do is to dance in the sun and sing!" She danced a few graceful steps, and trilled a bar or two.

The Vicar was warming his legs before the fire. He said: "It would not be a bad idea, really, for me to drop in on the dancers. Many of them must be parishioners of mine. It might encourage them if I put in an appearance, eh?"

"They don't need encouraging in what they're up to this evening," said Mr. Jerrold. "I shouldn't go, if I were you."

"One thing that has surprised me since I came here," said Derek, "is that the Scots do not go to church. I had always thought they were inveterate churchgoers."

"We all have our illusions," laughed Mr. Jerrold. "I used to think that the Englishman of the labouring class was a domineering fellow, rather rough with his womenfolk. I know now that, whatever he may be abroad, he is amazing meek at home and it is the woman who does the bossing. They are tartars, too."

Grace followed Derek to the hall when he went for his top-coat. "I like your brother," she said.

"I liked him too—until today."

She flushed and said plaintively: "You do take sudden dislikes, don't you? You don't like Miss Pearsall; you have turned against your own brother; shall I be the next?"

"Well, be careful what you do," he warned.

5.

The footsteps of the brothers rang crisply on the smooth, hard road as they returned to Grimstone. On their left, the frosty stubble of the shore meadows swept in silvery undulations beneath the bright half-moon that, like a noble ship, ploughed her way across a billowy sky. Clouds and moon were alike reflected on the still, burnished shield of the lake.

As they neared the house they heard the scrape of fiddles, and the stamp of jigging feet. Lights streamed from the dining room, kitchen, and back-kitchen. Derek quickened his steps. He strained towards the crude jollity of the dance. Here, at least, there would be no Miss Pearsall.

They entered quietly by the front door, hanging their caps and coats in the hallway before they went to the dining room. The dancing was in full swing, but there was a moment of hesitation and embarrassment when the Vales entered. Derek at once introduced Edmund to Miss Carss, the handsome daughter of the head gardener at Durras, who was too proud to dance with any of the Mistwell lads, or any of Vale's men, except Windmill. She had been brought by Hobbs, who looked rather horsey in a check suit, red tie, and hunting-crop tie pin. Derek took as his partner the plump daughter of a fisherman, Nan Hinton. She was a good dancer in a hearty, stamping way, and a certain roughness in his nature responded to the appeal of her throbbing, healthy body, her coarse, curly hair which tickled his cheek, and the clasp of her strong, freckled hand. The rooms were hot and heavy with the perfume of the balsam and hemlock boughs which the Scotchmen had hung above the doorways. He saw Mrs. Machin staring at him with disapproval in her eyes. He held Nan the closer for that, and threw himself with more energy into the dance. Gunn was whirling round and round with a black-eyed, plump girl, as rosy as himself. They looked into each other's eyes, grinning happily. New-

bigging had kissed his partner, and she was protesting loudly that she would dance with him no more, the while she still jigged on and courted another kiss. Only Hugh McKay looked glum, standing in a corner, gnawing his knuckle, for Phœbe hung exultantly on the shoulder of a young fisherman whose eyes shone in his tanned face, blue as the winter lake. Derek felt sorry for Hugh and when the waltz was over he went to Phœbe and said sternly:

"You must go and dance with Hugh, Phœbe. He's getting very huffish."

"Huffish, is he? Oh, the very idear! How can he be huffish after the way I bear with him month in and month out? Oh, he's an unnatural lover if ever there was one!"

But she went to him and, though at first he refused her belated compliance, he was before long dancing in sulky submission.

After supper, which was hot and substantial, Hobbs took Miss Carss away, lest the increasing roughness should offend her. He told Derek he was glad to see him mixing with his "help." "I'm a good mixer, myself," he said.

As the evening wore on the room became very hot, the music wilder, the dancers more abandoned to pleasure. The faces of the men grew red, their collars sagged, the eyes of the girls grew languorous, it seemed that their hair must fall down; the rhythmic beat of their feet on the floor, the swaying of their healthy bodies, their clasped, hot hands held them in a spell. Mrs. Machin had gone to bed. An epidemic of kissing broke out. Derek and Edmund slipped quietly into the passage, and went upstairs to the cold little study.

"Have you had enough?" Derek asked.

"I've never spent such a Christmas!" declared Edmund, thumping him joyously on the shoulder. "I've enjoyed every minute of it. There's something about those simple, coun-

try wenches that is very attractive. I danced with every blessed one of them. . . . How cold it is here!"

"Light your pipe," said Derek, "that will help warm you. They'll go very soon." He got a travelling rug and laid it over his brother's knees.

6.

Edmund stayed two weeks with Derek. A part of almost every day was spent with the Jerrolds. The roads were good, the air pleasantly crisp; the four took long rides together. Derek felt that he had shown himself churlish on Christmas Day, so after that he almost invariably dropped behind to ride with Mr. Jerrold while Edmund and Grace cantered ahead.

On New Year's Day, as they rode beside the bluffs, Grace's horse took fright at a white cat that crossed the road dragging the body of a rabbit, and shied almost to the edge of the rocky steep. It was Edmund who reached her first, who caught the bridle, and led the rearing horse to safety. Father and daughter seemed to look on him as a splendid fellow. And so he was! A brother to be proud of. Why then the sullen, burning anger when the voice of Grace floated back next day, calling him Edmund? Was this shameful feeling jealousy? Derek thought not. One must be in love first. . . . He was scarcely in love with Grace. He liked her, admired her; the thought of her pretty hair would come to him at the most unexpected times. Sometimes he met her eyes or her cool, amused, little smile in his dreams. Still, that was scarcely love. He could spend whole days among his horses and cattle and never think of her. And she so near! He concluded that it was just a precious friendship, and that some base strain in himself resented the thought of Edmund' ›eing admitted to the same friendship. As a kind of discipline then, he would stay at home sometimes and let Edmund go to Durras alone.

Or was it cowardice that kept him home? The childish fear of seeing them together?

He was not introspective. He was singularly inarticulate. He did not try to analyze his feelings or find words for them. He groped among them as he tramped over his fields or exercised his arms in currying the silken sides of the new filly who blew her sweet breath down his neck as she turned to nose him. The brothers did not speak of Grace until they stood on the platform the day of Edmund's departure. Then Derek said:

"I don't suppose I need look forward to a long separation, Ted. . . . Not with such an attraction next door."

Edmund answered seriously: "I can never hope for anything there. I'm too damned poor."

"Is she—going to write to you?"

"Of course."

There was that wretched stab at the heart again! He was thankful for the shriek of the locomotive. He wrung Edmund's hand.

He did not go to the Jerrolds for a fortnight.

CHAPTER XI

The Rill in the Wood

1.

*W*hen spring came Derek had the new red sleigh stored away under canvas. He heaved a deep sigh as he gave the order, for there had been no snow all winter, and the sleigh had never been out of the carriage house. Still, it had been a pleasant winter, days when there was always something of interest on the farm, long evenings spent before the fireside at Durras. His relations with Grace Jerrold had become happy again, though not quite so happy as before Edmund's visit. Still, sometimes there were little flashes of atoning tenderness between them, when her gentle, ironic smile would become almost maternal.

At Grimstone things went very well, though there was occasionally some roughness of temper in the men thrown together so constantly, with little amusement, except what they made for themselves. Windmill came in for a good deal of chaff because of his attentions to Miss Carss. They were often seen walking on the bluffs in the moonlight, his arm about her shapely waist, and her long scarf streaming in the wind.

Phœbe lost a front tooth in February, broken off while biting a hard russet apple. Not at all abashed by the loss, she smiled, it seemed, more broadly than ever, as though she were rather proud of the gap. It was evident that she was secure in Hugh's love and admiration; as a matter of truth, no man could look on the milk and roses of Phœbe's

cheeks or the subtle curves of her smooth arms and neck without admiration.

It was a forward spring, and all hands were needed for the rush of farm work. Derek, therefore, was exasperated, even hurt, when Gunn came to him one morning in April and announced that he had engaged to work for Chard. He wished to leave that night.

"Well, Gunn, it is very annoying," said Derek, "after my keeping you in comparative idleness all winter, to have you leave me just when you would be of some use."

"Comparative idleness!" cried Gunn. "Idleness! What about all them drains we dug, and the care of the stock? Do ye ca' that idleness?"

"Two men could easily have done what the four of you did. Do you suppose for a minute, that I should have kept you sitting beside the stove all winter if I had known you would leave in the spring?"

"Well, I'm goin' anyway." His small black eyes were sulky.

"What the devil's the matter? Is Chard paying you more?"

"It's no money. It's environment. I dinna like the environment here. For one thing, I'm sick to death o' Mrs. Machin's cookin'. She maks our porridge so stiff ye could stumble over it, and she gie's us clout puddin's nearly every day. She doesn't gie us what you get on your table at all. Mrs. Chaird is a fine cook. She bakes pies and cakes every morning. Their Dick tells me he's treated just like one o' the family. Another thing. Newbigging and I can't get on togither and never shall. And I'm awfu' sick o' watchin' Phœbe and Hughie spoon, and o' Windmill and his upstairt ways."

"It is time you went. But, you know, I have the power to hold you for a month's notice, Gunn."

Gunn grinned. "I dinna think I'd be much guid if I was held," he said.

"Well, you're no prize at your best," said Derek. "You can go."

Shortly afterwards Gunn carried his tin box through the gate. That afternoon, walking through his orchard, Derek saw him at work hoeing among Chard's gooseberry bushes, Chard by his side. "Chard will get the last squeak out of him, and I wish him luck," thought Derek.

2.

Windmill and Newbigging were spraying the orchard. Windmill held the hose while Newbigging pumped the machine. A glittering green rainbow of the evil-smelling Bordeaux mixture curved above the freshly budded trees. Newbigging sang a sailor's chanty as he pumped. His mind seemed full of the sea those spring days, and Derek feared that some day he, too, would get restless and leave. In spite of Mrs. Machin's protest, he raised the wages of the remaining men.

He climbed the low fence at the end of the orchard and, passing the acres of pruned berry canes, entered the lane. He intended to inspect a field of fall wheat at the back of the farm, now submerged by recent rains.

At the edge of the wood he heard his name called, and saw Mr. Jerrold striding towards him across the grass meadow. His dogs were as always at his heels. He came up and rested his arm on the fence. He began to talk with, what seemed to Vale, rather forced cheerfulness, of the prospect of early crops. Presently he said, looking into Derek's eyes with sudden seriousness:

"I wonder if you could lend me some money."

"Rather," said Derek, quickly, trying not to seem taken aback. "How much?"

"I know you're surprised at my asking, Vale, but things

have gone very badly with me the past year. I have notes to meet. Expenses are devilishly high. It takes a pile of money just to pay the men's wages. Of course, last year was exceptional. Everything went against me. It will probably never happen again. As a matter of fact, I can see the day approaching when Durras will flourish and repay me all the money I have put in it. In the meantime—" he gave his confident smile—"I thank God I have a good friend who comes to my assistance."

"Mr. Jerrold," said Derek, "I wish you would get rid of Hobbs. I don't think he is the best man for this place. He talks impressively, and he understands his work, I grant, but he spends a great deal of time on the road driving that fast white horse, or boasting about his achievements at the Duke of York. Mrs. Machin says—oh, well, you needn't laugh, she's a pretty shrewd old head—she says that you could do with far fewer men; and you told me yourself that a carload of your apples went to waste last year, and you lost Count Robert because Hobbs didn't send for the vet. in time. I hope you don't mind my talking like this."

A shadow flitted over Mr. Jerrold's vigorous, sanguine face. "No, no. I don't mind a bit. It's true, too, what you say. But, look here, Vale, are you under the impression that Hobbs is a poor man? That seems a ridiculous question . . . the truth is . . . oh, Lord! I've borrowed money from the man. An uncle died in the Old Country two years ago. Left him rich. I haven't borrowed a little. I've borrowed a lot." He stood shamefaced, like a boy who has made confession, hitting his leg with the stick he carried.

Derek was aghast. "Why did Hobbs stay on then—after the fortune was left him?"

"I don't know. Said he liked the job. Hopes some day perhaps—well, he's a fool. I'll pay him off very soon and

fire him. I'm tired of him; though in some ways I don't see how I shall replace him."

"Well, I am very glad you came to me," said Derek. "How much do you want?"

He was surprised at the largeness of the sum mentioned by Mr. Jerrold, but he promised to write a cheque for it that day.

3.

A little stream, nothing more than a rill, nosed its way delicately among the ferns and brambles of the Grimstone wood, and, after curving about a bank of violets, slipped under the boundary fence into Durras, hurried over a sloping meadow and was lost in the creek.

When Mr. Jerrold and he had parted Derek strolled musingly along the bank of the rill, his mind dwelling, now on Mr. Jerrold's ill fortune, now, half-consciously, upon a certain melancholy unrest within himself. He was absent-minded, erratic, changeable, and he wondered vaguely why. He had set out to inspect the fall wheat, and now he did not care whether it were submerged or not. He was much more interested in the fate of an empty bird's nest, doubtless torn from its branch by some boy, robbed of its eggs, and thrown in the little stream. It bobbed and jigged like some ludicrous old boat; its progress was stayed by a few spears of grass; it was free again, and caught in a tiny eddy, whirled and danced as though it had never held five throbbing little hearts within its woven curve.

The white turkey-hen came from under an elderberry bush, trailing her slender feet, and craning her neck to peer at the bird's nest. She gave Derek a gloomy yet not unfriendly glance. "She feels like I do," thought Derek, "and Newbigging is the same. There's a vagabond streak in all three of us." She swept back into the shadow of the bush and sank wearily and yet mysteriously to her nest.

Derek followed her and looked down. "You know," he said, "I'm perfectly aware of what you're up to. And it's no use. You never bring anything out. I don't believe there's anything to bring. That empty nest was an omen for you. Better give up trying and just be ornamental." She looked out at him, her head delicately poised, with the cold, aloof regard of a snake.

A meadow lark rose from its nest in the meadow beyond. Turning his eyes to watch its flight Derek saw Grace Jerrold kneeling bareheaded by the rill. Her face was half-hidden, but her posture suggested sadness. She sad, too, on this mirthful day of spring! As he looked, she raised her hand from the moist grass and held it to her eyes. She was quietly crying. Again she laid her hand on the grass—a gentle white hand, he thought, like a flower. He wanted very much to comfort her. But how to speak—how to pass comfort through this damnable barbed wire fence! His eyes fell on the bird's nest. He snatched it up. It should bear the cargo of his comfort past that barbed barrier. He took a small note book from his pocket, tore out a leaf, and wrote, very carefully, so that one might read it easily through tears—"Please don't cry." He folded it, laid it in the nest, now a useless derelict no longer, and set it carefully in the middle of the rill just under the fence. He loosed it. For a space it floated languidly against a spray of watercress, then a masterful current took it in hand, and hurried it quickly on its mission. The rill broadened where Grace knelt and Derek feared for a moment that his note would be rushed past her unseen, but the instant the nest appeared before her, the white hand that had been raised to wipe another tear, darted out and swept it ashore. She opened the note. She read. She sprang to her feet and faced him. He could see then that her white cheeks were dabbled with tears.

"You looked like a Greek girl," he said, to make light of the situation, "kneeling to pray to the deity of the stream."

"Offering my tears," she said, with a little smile, coming towards him. She still held the nest as though it were a treasure. Derek suddenly remembered his conversation with Fawnie among the raspberry canes about a goldfinch's nest.

"Can I help?" he asked.

"That's the trouble. I'm crying because father has asked you to help. I begged him not to. But he has. When I saw you two talking—and your expressions—I knew."

"You know too," he said, gently, "that it gives me real pleasure to help your father. And it will make it easier for me to ask his help some day. Think how gladly he would give it."

"Oh, but you don't understand! Things are going very badly with us. Of course, William will repay you this loan, but—he is so optimistic, and he does not foresee great difficulties arising—as I do. But don't let us talk of it any more. Tell me where you found the nest. You know, that was rather a sweet thing you did. I sha'n't forget it."

He noticed then that she was wearing a white skirt and a close-fitting green jersey. Her bronze hair was loosened from its usual smoothness by the wind. He thought she looked the very spirit of spring.

"Tell me," she said, suddenly, "if you had it to do over again would you come to Grimstone as you did? Or should you sell it and stick to Halifax and your profession?"

"I should come if it were only for the sake of being near you." His heart began to beat quickly as he heard his own words. He was moved by an exquisite desire to take her into his arms, to press the feminine softness of the silk jersey against his rough tweed coat, to smell the perfume of that sunny bronze hair. Yet there stood the fence!

She saw the look in his eyes. He felt that she read him. They both laughed. Was she laughing with him or at him? Though he laughed he had a feeling of chagrin. He felt angry with her. Angrier still when he fancied she looked relieved as the figure of Hobbs approached on his white horse.

Hobbs touched his hat. He said, "I'm sorry to inform you, Mr. Vale, that those Welsh ponies of yours have broken down the fence by our wheat fields. Your horses and cows are in there now. I'm just sending some men up to turn them out. Sorry to interrupt you."

CHAPTER XII

The Wind Out of Windmill's Sails

1.

Things seemed determined to go wrong that spring. Phœbe affirmed that from the moment when she had set her teeth in that hard russet apple which had snapped off a perfectly good incisor misfortunes had come tripping on one another's heels. Excessive rains had swollen the stream until it had grown to a tumbling, coffee-coloured torrent, in which a ewe and her skipping lamb had lost their lives. Bessie, Derek's favourite Jersey, had given birth to twin calves, both of which had died, and she, herself, had been ailing ever since. Mike had torn his leg on a piece of barbed wire, carelessly left dangling at a fence corner—it was impossible to tell by whom—and had severed an artery. Derek would never forget Mike's hard breathing and the look in his distended eyes as he stood beside him miserably waiting for the veterinary, while the blood gushed from the wound as from a tap, making a thick puddle on the floor of the stall. Mike had recovered but must go easy for a while; another horse had to be purchased, and it turned out that he was full of nasty tricks, in stall and field—the men vied with each other in repeating Philip's misdeeds. The heavy rain produced a growth of rank weeds that fought for supremacy over the mangolds, turnips, and garden vegetables. Old Peek and Mrs. Orde's short-legged husband, and four boys from Mistwell were constantly employed in weeding, and in sorting the last of the apple crop in the apple-house. Carelessness in storing defective apples

and leaves among the good ones, combined with the mildness of the winter, had caused a great deal of rot. The sound apples had to be separated and washed, and the decayed thrown to the pigs. The air about the apple-house was full of a sweet, acrid, ciderish smell.

Derek anxiously waited for a new man to be sent by the Immigration Agency in York, but every farm seemed to be in need of help, and experienced men were few.

One morning in late May Hugh strode up to Derek, where he stood on the porch snuffing the fresh breeze from the lake. Phœbe followed Hugh closely, her eyes dancing with excitement behind her spectacles.

"Guid mornin', sir," said Hugh, "and I've got to tell ye that Newbigging's flitted. He was restless all day yesterday, and last nicht he sat by the window peerin' out and wouldna coom to bed, and when he did, he kept me awake wi' his tossing. Then, this morn he must have been up with the birds, for when I woke at sunrise he was gone, and his wee bag, and his box wi' the gilt collar studs, and his wee red book of songs. He's flitted for certain."

"And I called over the fence and told Bob Gunn," said Phœbe, "and he said it was all one could expect from one of those chaps from Dundee. He's getting pretty sick of Chard's, Bob is."

That evening Bob himself came to Derek, short, stocky, and rosy as ever. "I hear Newbigging's made off," he said.

"Yes, what's that to you?" asked Derek, shortly.

"Nothing. But I'll come back and fill his place if ye say the word, Mr. Vale."

"What, you want to leave Chard after only a month?"

"A month can seem like a lifetime, sometimes, sir. He's a regular slave-driver, Chaird is. The very first nicht I was there after an awfu' day's work, he says after supper, 'Come on now, Bob, and get busy cuttin' up potatoes for seed.'

'Cut up potatoes!' I said. 'Why we never work in the evenings at Mr. Vale's.' 'Weel,' says he, 'we work all the time here, and anyone who won't do it, can get out.' "

"It served you right for leaving me."

"Will ye hae me back, sir? Now that Newbigging's gone, me and the other lads 'd get along fine."

"What about Mrs. Chard's pies?"

"Pies! I'm fair sick o' the very sicht o' pie. She gies them to us even for breakfast."

"Well, you've made your bed, Gunn, and you must lie on it—"

"It's straw and awfu' lumpy," interrupted Gunn.

"I'll not have Mr. Chard saying that I took you away from him," went on Derek. "What do you think you are, Gunn, a shuttlecock, to be bandied back and forth across the fence?"

"I'm no shuttlecock," said Gunn, his eyes snapping. "I'm a free British citizen, and I can't be forced to stop anywhere. I'll gang where I please."

"You can go to the devil as far as I'm concerned," said Derek, packing tobacco into his pipe with the handle of his pocket knife. "You played me a dirty trick, and I'm through with you."

Gunn turned away, his rosy face puckered with chagrin. "Weel, good-bye, and I'm no' afeerd to say that you'll wish you had me back before the summer's through." He hung about a moment, irresolutely, and then walked slowly back to Chard's.

2.

Derek, impatient at the delay of the immigration officials in sending him help, had taken the train to York to impress them, if possible, with his extreme need. He could not believe that other farms were crying for succor so urgently as Grimstone. Yet the officials, though polite, were

singularly callous to his need, and offered as a sop only one poor creature, Snailem by name, suspiciously smooth of hand, who now sat in the other end of the coach gazing out of window with dull eyes that, Derek thought, would blink before the problem of distinguishing a reaper from a mower. Still, he was a "hand," and Derek determined to get the utmost out of him till more help came, which was promised shortly.

He, too, gazed through the window at the fields steaming in a hot sunset after a day of rain. He saw woods flash by, rounded in all the rank effulgence of their springing maturity; hillsides dotted by plump ewes with sucking lambs butting against their udders; black, rich fields where wet-booted men still seeded the hungry soil. He saw a deep cut through a cedar wood, where a narrow stream ran far below, its course marked by white lilies and lady's slipper. A heron rose heavily above it, his long legs stiff, his neck stretched, his wings beating against the flaring sunset.

Derek felt very content. Life in all its intensity surged about him, and he was part of all this divine, strange vivacity of living—the steaming fields—the flying heron—the flying train—even Snailem, surreptitiously slipping a wad of tobacco into his untidy mouth.

Across the way a young woman comforted her little boy, who was crying because he had bumped his nose on the window sill. She gave him and his sister each a sponge cake, and kissed the little bumped nose, and laughed. The two children ate the cakes hungrily, but the boy dug the caraway seeds out of his and laid them on the plush seat beside him. His mother, seeing him deposit the last one there, gave him a little slap and brushed the seeds hurriedly to the floor. The boy puckered his face to cry again, but seeing Derek laughing at him, he laughed too, and, in a moment, sidled across the aisle and stood at his side.

"You don't like caraway seeds, eh?" said Derek.

"I frow 'em away."

"That's a mistake. They'll give you muscle—make you strong."

"What's the use of being strong?" said the little fellow, his mouth down at the corners; "there's always somebody else stronger."

"Cyril," called his mother, "come here, this moment. Don't be so forward."

"Sha'n't go," said Cyril. "I'll stop here till we get to Mistwell."

"He does need a man to straighten him," confided the mother, leaning across. "His father's been out two years now. We're just coming to him. . . . It's an awful thing crossing the ocean and taking such a long rileway journey with young children."

"I'll see that you get off all right," said Derek. "Is your husband at Mr. Jerrold's?"

"No. He's with a Mr. Vile, at a farm called Grimstone, quite near Mistwell. He's not expecting us—." Her face flushed, and grew hard.

Derek was staggered. Rapidly the faces of his four men flitted across his mental vision—rosy, beady-eyed Gunn, altogether too young—brown, honest Hugh—if it were he, Good God! what a time they would have with Phoebe—Windmill, who was courting Miss Carss, and who was a notch above this worried, dowdy, little woman surely—Newbigging, ah, Newbigging, who had so lately "flitted," having got wind perhaps of his wife's intentions. It must be Newbigging.

He had leaned back staring out at the fields without seeing them. Now he asked the little boy, who had squeezed into the seat beside him, "What is your other name—besides Cyril?"

"Windmill . . . And daddy's name's Windmill, and mother's name's Windmill, and Ruby's name's—"

The train stopped with a jolt, its grinding of wheels drowning the child's voice. Derek was thankful; he felt that he could stand no more reiterations of that name.

3.

He had helped the woman into the 'bus. He had sent Snailem in it, too, and had paid the fares of all four. Then he had set out on foot himself, determining to telephone to Windmill and prepare him for the coming visitation. Although he pitied the dowdy little wife, some loyalty of sex made him pity, still more, the erring husband. Poor Windmill! who had fainted in the field the day before because of the heat, and who was probably now washing and dressing, after a hard day in the fields, in preparation for his evening walk with Miss Carss, all unconscious of the weary Nemesis that was rolling towards him in the 'bus.

Derek called up Grimstone from the village store. Phœbe's voice came thickly over the wire as though she were eating something. Windmill? Oh, he was out. The usual, she s'posed. He'd hurried right off after tea. She had a terrible sore throat and would Mr. Vale fetch her a few peppermint bull's-eyes from the shop?

Derek hung up the receiver and bought the bull's-eyes from the shop-keeper's wife, who grunted as each one dropped from the jar, as though it hurt her. Disconsolately he left the shop and walked slowly towards Grimstone. His one idea now was to loiter till the worst should be over when he arrived. He could picture that little woman making a pretty scene. He put a bull's-eye in his mouth and sucked it meditatively, feeling rather as he used to at eight, when he had a mind to be late for school.

As he was passing the graveyard he heard a rattle of wheels behind him, and, turning, saw the 'bus lumbering up.

Good Lord! He had thought it had reached Grimstone long ago. Now he remembered to have seen Jackman in it, a farmer who lived a mile east of Mistwell. He had been driven home first! The 'bus driver drew up his horses. "Can I give you a lift, sir?" he called.

Derek swallowed his third bull's-eye and climbed into the 'bus. He was in for the scene after all!

Cyril, Ruby, and Mrs. Windmill smiled as though he were an old friend. Snailem tried to smile, but he was manipulating a fresh wad of tobacco and it took all his skill.

"The 'bus driver tells me that you are Mr. Vile," said Mrs. Windmill. "I'm so glad, for I'm sure you'll tell my husband that I did right in coming to him. It's no way for husband and wife to live, and—I've heard rumors. So I just sold my bit of furniture and came strite across. His father gave me money for the passage, so you can see what his family feel about it."

"I shouldn't place much dependence in rumors, if I were you," said Derek. "A man sometimes makes a friend when he's far from home, but he means nothing wrong—he's just lonely."

"Mr. Vile, did my husband tell you he is a married man?"

"No," acknowledged Derek, "he didn't."

"Oh! the villain!"

"Be careful. That man Snailem will hear you."

"It mikes me wild. Look at his two lovely kiddies—and him not to own to them."

"He does not tell me his affairs."

"And I sent him their picture at Christmas. I'll wiger he never showed it to that minx he's walking out with!"

"This is my place," said Derek, thankfully, as the 'bus stopped. He swung the children to the ground, and helped Mrs. Windmill with her bundles; Snailem let himself down heavily, and cast a dismal look over the farm. There was

no sign of life about. The air was moist, heavy, and filled with the honeyed smell of the locust flowers. The lake lay still as molten lead, following the hot exuberance of sunset.

The 'bus rattled away. Derek sent Snailem to the kitchen to report to Mrs. Machin. Then he turned to Mrs. Windmill. "Don't you think it would be best," he said, "for you to wait here a bit? I'll find your husband and send him to you." She assented, and he went through the house to the kitchen.

He found Snailem and Mrs. Machin there, she regarding him as he stood before her, with the ironical grin of an old spider who had just caught a stupid fly in her web . . . not the sort of fly she fancied but one which nevertheless had to be demolished.

"Where is Windmill?" demanded Derek.

"He ain't here," replied Mrs. Machin, "that's all I know about him. He went out half an hour ago, slicked up like a city feller."

"I must send Hugh to find him. His wife is here. I don't want her to see him perhaps with Miss Carss. I'd better fetch her in."

"His wife?" Mrs. Machin's grin broadened. "Well, he kep' it mighty quiet. Here's a pretty kettle of fish. Fool!"

Phœbe dashed in from the outer kitchen followed by Hugh.

"Hugh," began Derek, "go over to Mr. Jerrold's—"

"Ow!" cried Phœbe, "there's a norful scene on the bluffs! Windmill and Miss Carss, and a woman in high-strikes. Come along out!"

They hurried to the flagged yard. On the bluffs they could see Windmill outlined against the sky, and beside him the tall figure of Miss Carss, her long veil fluttering in a freshly sprung breeze. Climbing towards them up the side of the bluff was the wife, her hat fallen back, her arms

waving, her voice raised in screams. Her two children were running far behind her down the road.

"I had a fambly once," remarked Snailem, "but they're all dead. Wife and triplets."

"Ow, the villain," cried Phœbe, "to desert his poor wife like that! He ought to be horsewhipped."

"Hold your tongue," ordered Mrs. Machin, "you'll likely be deserted yourself some day."

They saw Windmill stride quickly to his wife and take her roughly by the arm. His touch only made her more violent, and Miss Carss, after watching them struggle for a moment, turned abruptly away and began to run along the bluffs towards home. Windmill's wife, seeing her rival retreat, ceased her screams, and sank exhausted to the grass. The two children reached their mother's side and threw themselves upon her, sobbing. Windmill's bowler hat was on one side. He stood looking down at the dishevelled heap of humanity before him, the wife of his bosom, and the two beings he had begotten, who had brought this shame, this chagrin, this retribution across the sea to him.

"It was for all the world like a play," heaved Phœbe from the depths of her.

"All the world's a stage," observed Snailem, moving closer to her.

"All the world 'ud be a work-house, if we was all as simple as some folks," snapped Mrs. Machin.

4.

Windmill and his wife sat for an hour or more on the cliff, talking earnestly. It was almost dark when he came at last to the house, leading one of his children by each hand. His wife, he explained, was not in a condition to meet strangers but she would like a pot of tea. He would carry it to her. He displayed his pink-cheeked children

proudly, and while Phœbe stuffed them with strawberries and cream, he told Vale, shamefacedly, that he must leave that very night. They could catch the late train for York, and they would return almost directly to the Old Country. His father was a boot manufacturer and he could go into the business at any time. He regretted leaving Canada for he loved the life, and—he had meant no harm by his friendship with Miss Carss—it was purely platonic.

Vale had Hugh harness the gelding and drive the family to the train. When Windmill had lifted his wife and whining infants into the surrey, and the huddle of drooping figures had disappeared into the dusk, Derek went to his room to read a letter from Edmund that had awaited him on his return from town.

He felt rueful over the loss of Windmill, and he opened the letter slowly. Edmund seemed to be in good spirits. Towards the end of the letter he wrote: "I think you can safely expect me to visit you before the summer is over. I am keen to see you, and besides, I have a mind to try my luck next door. It seems audacious, I know, but I have reason to hope. Anyway, it would not be the first time that a beautiful heiress has thrown herself away on a penniless young officer. God knows, I do not want her money but I do want her, desperately. I know you wish me luck."

After reading the letter Derek felt more rueful than ever. Indeed, he felt perilously near to being sick at heart.

PART II

PART II

CHAPTER I

An Earring Upon the Ear of the Guilty

1.

The Sharroe family had promised to pick fruit at Grimstone that summer. They were expected any day; and it was high time they came, for under every strawberry leaf red berries winked ripely, growing redder hour by hour. The weather had become hot and dry; a strong wind blew the sandy dust in clouds from the driveway all day till sundown, when it fell, leaving the air heavy and oppressive.

Vale was in his bedroom, washing, and brushing his hair before going to Durras to spend the evening. He heard the sound of voices, and cries of children on the road, and went to the window, hoping that it might be the Sharroes. That wayward family was indeed turning in at the gate. No imposing figure of Solomon Sharroe led them now, but his squatty wife carrying an immense bundle; and there was Fawnie, and Jammery; and Esther and Maggie with their husbands; and Charley and Bobby; and Beulah and Alma (each bearing a baby in her arms) and, last of all, the idiot boy, riding on the back of a brother scarce larger than himself.

Poor, ignorant, innocent children! He had intended having a new cottage built for them this season, but they must once more make shift with the old shack. And little Fawnie. . . . He wondered whether she would want a hen to set this year. He remembered her little, round, coffee-

coloured neck, and her even teeth, like so many pearls. And those small, supple, berry-stained hands. "You are a little baggage, Fawnie," he had said to her, in his moment of chagrin. "You mean I act like I was white," she had answered.

He went slowly from his room to the passage and took his straw hat from the rack. He whistled for a half-grown Irish terrier pup that Mr. Jerrold had given him, but the puppy did not come. He went to the kitchen to look for him, fearing that Phœbe was feeding him a second supper.

As he expected, the puppy was there, his sides drawn together, his legs apart, as he wolfed the greasy contents of a bowl. "Phœbe! Phœbe!" expostulated Derek, "How often have I told you not to let that little brute gorge himself!"

"I can't help it," said Phœbe, "the creature gives me no peace till I do."

There was a chuckling sound at the door and Derek saw the round faces of Beulah and Alma pressed against the screen.

"Phœbe," said Beulah, grinning, "kin I have a point of milk?"

"Oh," cried Phœbe, impatiently, "you and your points of milk! The moment you arrive, I'm running to the milk jug, or the paraffin jar, or the butter crock. Where's your money?" Beulah showed a few blackened coppers, and Phœbe went to the cellar, still scolding.

Beulah cautiously opened the door and put her rough black head inside. "Say," she whispered, "my Maw wants to see you—up at the shack—I was to say, come now."

"What does she want me for? Tell her to come here if she wants to see me."

"She don' want the old woman and Phœbe to hear. She says there'll be a lot of trouble if you don' come."

"Very well," said Derek, "but if she thinks I will pay any more for the picking she's mistaken."

Phœbe brought the milk and Derek set out through the orchard with the children. It was dusk, and a lantern had been lighted in the old part of the shack. A red shaft of light through the open door pierced the dimness of the orchard like the gleam of a baleful eye. Under the trees the air was intensely sultry. As Derek drew near, the two little girls suddenly darted away from his side, so that he approached alone. At the same instant several dark figures passed out of the shack and appeared to go around to the addition.

When Derek stood in the doorway, only the old squaw, Fawnie, Esther, and Jammery were inside. Fawnie was standing under the lantern. In the red glow her cheeks had the bloom of a dark, ripe peach. Her lips were pressed together in an inscrutable smile. Esther and Jammery stood with bent heads, but the old woman turned a look of thunderous fury on Derek.

"Look here, Mr. Vale," she said, in a thick voice, "I want you to take that woman o' yours away out o' here. I won't stand her around me any longer."

Derek stared at her in astonishment. "What woman?" he said, sharply. "What do you mean?"

"That woman there," she replied jerking her head towards Fawnie. "That woman that's got a baby born of yours last April. You get her out o' here or I'll kill her."

Derek turned to Esther—she had always seemed a sensible girl. "Is your mother crazy?" he asked.

Esther answered composedly, "No, she ain't crazy, she's just mad. Fawnie's got a little boy belongin' to you and Maw says she won't have any white babies livin' with her."

Derek looked at her directly, ignoring the old squaw.

"Well, she has Alma. She's half white. She's yours, isn't she?"

"Yes, but I was married to her paw, all right. He got killed one winter—loggin'."

"Alma!" shouted the mother. "Let me at that girl! I'll kill her yet, with her white face like dough! She looks down on her old grandmaw. She thinks I'm like the dirt under her feet. She'd like to wipe her feet on me. She'd like to spit on me. I'll take an axe and chop her head off yet. Jus' let me at that girl. . . . Fawnie, you show Mr. Vale the papoose that you got of his."

Fawnie, still with her inscrutable smile, turned to one of the bunks and picked up a rolled shawl. She opened it and showed something that slept curled up like a mouse. Derek saw that the down on its head gleamed like silver in the lantern light.

Fawnie smiled at it adoringly. "My little baby," she said. "My own little baby." She seemed singularly undisturbed by the storm about her. It appeared that they might do with her what they wished, if only she be allowed to keep her plaything. With a violent gesture the mother snatched it from her and thrust it into Derek's arms. "Here!" she shouted, "take your brat—and take Fawnie, too—or I'll kill 'em!" Derek would have dropped the child, but Jammery took it from him lightly, and, with an imploring look at the old squaw, said: "Please don't make so much noise. Let me go out with Mr. Vale, and talk things over quietly. You come too, Fawnie."

"You take them out and don't bring them back," said Mrs. Sharroe.

Thankful to escape from the insufferable odors of the shack, Derek drew a deep breath of the night air. Fawnie, Jammery, the child in his arms, and he, moved some

distance into the orchard. The puppy, with short, sharp cries, started off in pursuit of something in the dark.

"Honestly," said Jammery, under his breath, "I think you'll have to take her away till the old woman cools down. She's pretty dangerous. It isn't just what she says—she does things. You'd hardly believe the way she can act, Mr. Vale. Honestly, she ought to be locked up when she gets these spells. Would you mind showing Mr. Vale your shoulders, Fawnie? If I light a match, I think he can get an idea . . . just loosen your dress."

He struck a light, and Derek, as one in a dream, peered at the girl's shoulder off which she had drawn her loose cotton blouse. "Ah, they scarcely show in this light at all," murmured Jammery, "but move your fingers over them. Feel." He took Derek's hand in his and laid it on her back. Derek, moving his fingers, felt one hot welt after another on the tender flesh. "By God!" he exclaimed, "I'll make that old woman suffer for this. I'll have her arrested."

"No, no," said Jammery, "don't do that. Think of the way she'd talk. She'd tell how you ruined the girl. Everything will be all right if you just keep Fawnie and the baby out of her sight for a few days."

"Very well," said Derek, "I'll take them down to the house now. There's plenty of room. But you tell the old squaw that I won't stand anything more from her. She's got to behave or to jail she goes. And you may be certain I'll never have her here another year."

"No, of course, not. But Fawnie's a good girl. She'll never make you sorry you protected her. It's an awful thing for a young girl to get walloped like that, so soon after childbirth."

"Stop talking about it," said Derek. It hurt him even

to think of such barbarity. "Come along, Fawnie. Poor little child."

2.

When they emerged from the orchard, Derek tried to see Fawnie's face but he could not. Yet he had the impression that she was still smiling in the darkness. He could make out the curve of her arms about the baby. He still felt like one in a dream. All this seemed most unreal, and, suddenly, he remembered that July night, a year ago, and the same dark girl whose face he could not see. And here were they two once more—and a third—the silver-haired being in the shawl—born, one might say, of that flash of lightning that had shown them the coign in the cliff.

A steamer was sweeping past; she showed a row of illuminated windows, and a brighter light at the bow. A bell clanged as she passed. . . . Now they were beneath the heavy aching scent of the locust flowers.

"Fawnie," said Derek, "we'll go in at the front door, so the men won't see you."

"The front door," she repeated, in a tone of awe. "Right in at the front door."

A hanging lamp burned in the hall. He hesitated a moment and then took her arm and guided her up the stairs. He had decided that he would give her the bedroom that had been got ready for Edmund at Christmas. There she could keep herself and her baby in seclusion for a few days, till the old squaw should quiet down. He would give Fawnie a little allowance, which would put her in quite a different position in her mother's household.

He lighted two candles that stood on the dressing-table. Their reflection flashed out in the looking-glass: his strong figure in white, his fair face flushed, little knots of per-

plexity between his brows; she, dusky, receptive, immobile, holding her baby to her breast.

He felt the allure of her presence in that remembered quiver of the nerves, but, pushing the sensation from him, he said,

"Now, I'm going to send Mrs. Machin to you. She'll fix you up for the night."

"No, I won't have her," with a stubborn shake of the head. "I'm scared of her, Durek. Just leave me here and I'll lay on the bed as nice as anything. I won't have that ole woman scoldin' me. I've had enough scoldin'."

"Very well. But I'll get her to give me some sheets and you can make your own bed."

"Sheets! My goodness"—her lips curved into a smile —"I would like sheets—and a white piller-case."

3.

"Well," said Mrs. Machin, when he had told her as much of the story as he thought was good for her to know, "so you expect me to wait on an Indian girl and her bastard brat, eh? Give 'em my best sheets, eh? And towels with rick-rack on the ends? What do you take me for, Mr. Vale? A simpleton?" Mrs. Machin was making the porridge for breakfast, and now she stirred it with all her might, and whacked the wooden porridge stick that was nearly as old as she, on the side of the porridge pot. "What do you take me for, Mr. Vale?" she repeated. "A simpleton to let a dirty Indian into one of my bedrooms? How should I get rid of her again—"

"I'll see to that."

"You've seen to about enough," she retorted grimly. "You haven't told me who that child belongs to, but I know what everybody'll say. They'll say it's yours. Now

the Vales have always been respectable. Grimstone is the grandest old place in the countryside, and would you go and disgrace us all?"

"My God," said Derek, "would you send that poor child back to her crazy mother to be beaten again, perhaps killed?"

"Why did she wait till she was coming here to beat her? Why did she bring her back here at all? Just because she thought you was easy prey. Leave me to deal with them Indians, Mr. Vale. I understand 'em, through and through, from their dirty black hair to their sneaky, flat feet. You leave 'em to me."

"Mrs. Machin," said Derek, firmly, "I am going to protect that young girl. Get me some sheets for her bed."

"I won't do nothing of the sort," she repeated, attacking the porridge with renewed spite. "If she sleeps here, she sleeps on the mattress or the floor. It don't matter to me."

"Very well. I'll get the sheets myself," He left her angrily, and strode through the house and up the stairway. He pulled open a heavy drawer in an old chest of drawers that stood at the top of the stairs. He knew that the bed linen was kept there. He had barely extracted a pair of sheets and was searching for pillow cases when Mrs. Machin came panting up the stairs behind him. She carried a lamp in her hand which she set down heavily on the chest.

"Here," she said, thickly, "if it's got to be done, I'll do it. I won't have you messin' about in my linen." She took the sheets from him roughly, and, after examining them with a groan, gave him two of coarser material, and a patched pillow case.

With a curt "thanks," Derek left her and went to Fawnie's door. He tapped.

The door opened a little way. He saw that Fawnie had laid the baby on the bed, and had opened the small drawers

on either side of the looking-glass, doubtless in the hope of discovering hidden finery.

"Here are sheets," he said. "There is a quilt on the bed. Now make it up quickly, like a good girl, and be off to sleep. You're safe."

"And make the most of this night, in a proper bed," interposed Mrs. Machin, "for it's likely the last you'll ever have."

The two women faced each other for a moment, as might a cynical old cat and an enquiring, yet self-possessed, little animal of the forest.

Derek hurriedly went downstairs, fearful of a scene. But there was none. He heard the door softly close, then Mrs. Machin's slowly retreating footsteps. He did not go to Durras, as he had intended but, descending the steps to the shore, walked up and down the hard sand, for a long time, smoking.

He saw the light extinguished in the room upstairs. Even yet the whole thing seemed a preposterous dream. That child. . . . Well, he had no doubt about it. Still, it was not the child, but Fawnie, who occupied his thoughts. He saw her in the shack, in the glow of the lantern, her lips folded together in that inscrutable, slightly derisive smile, as though the rest had been puppets gesticulating about her. Then her composure before Mrs. Machin. It was really fine; though, Heaven only knew how her heart may have been tapping on her side. What was there about her? Some odd barbaric charm. Even old Solomon had seen it, known that she was not like the others. "Her man will have to pick for the two of them," he had said. She was a being for love alone—yet love was not the word—it was ridiculous—simply she must be cared for. She was Oriental, like some strange, sweet fruit that allured, even though one knew it were poison.

What would Grace Jerrold think of his bringing Fawnie into his house, protecting her? She would understand; she would sympathize. But the child—she must never know of that; he grew hot all over at the very thought of her knowing it. Anyway, the night was insufferable, no wonder he was hot. Not the faintest ripple disturbed the sombre ebony of the lake. He longed for a storm to clear the air. Awful weather on the strawberries. Thank God, he would have plenty of pickers tomorrow. Fresh crates were needed. He must order them. . . .

It was late when he went into the house. The oil lamp was still burning on the dresser at the head of the stairs. Mrs. Machin evidently had forgotten it. He began to ascend slowly to put it out, but had only mounted a few steps when he perceived that she herself was sitting in a straight-backed chair by the dresser knitting at a grey stocking.

"Whatever are you doing up so late?" he asked, dreading the answer.

"Well," she said, her needles clicking with precision, "now that yon girl has got into one of our bedrooms I'm going to see to it that she stays there."

"You don't mean to say you are going to sit there all night?"

"It looks like it, don't it?" she snapped.

There was nothing more to be said, so Derek went to his room.

CHAPTER II

Hubbub at Grimstone

1.

It seemed to Derek that he spent the next day in avoiding people. He bolted his breakfast, his appetite spoiled by the ashen presence of Mrs. Machin who waited on him herself. She had even fried kidneys for him, which she knew he disliked. He hurried over his orders to Hugh McKay, irritated, and yet depressed by the expression of deep melancholy on the fellow's honest face. He would have welcomed a talk with Mr. Jerrold, but he heard that he was laid up by an attack of lumbago, and he would not venture to go to Durras for fear of meeting Grace. It occurred to him that he was being made vastly uncomfortable for doing a humane and just act. Many a man would have bundled the whole crew off his farm.

The Indians avoided him, too. All day they squatted in the blazing sun among the strawberries, never lifting their eyes when he passed. Added to the enervating heat, a tension of suppressed excitement hung over Grimstone like a cloud charged with stormy portent. Under that hard blue sky the Indians, the hired help, and Derek moved like people in a secret game, watching in furtive fashion for someone to make the next move.

In the afternoon Derek went to the basket factory. He found the drive over the sandy roads incredibly hot and stifling. The man at the factory told him that the thermometer registered 100 degrees in the shade. He let the gelding take his time home, so that the shadows were

lengthening on the lawn when he turned in his own gates. He had met the fruit wagon laden with crates of strawberries on its way to the station. On a circular seat under one of the walnut trees he saw a woman sitting. It was Fawnie. She must have got her things from the shack, for she wore a dress of coarse white embroidery, a red sash, and a hat nodding with red poppies. It was amazing how she gave the effect of ease, and grace, even elegance, sitting erect on that white seat. And the extraordinary cheek of her, thought Derek. Mrs. Machin would be in a taking, as Phœbe said; he dreaded meeting her. The situation was getting preposterous. . . . Mrs. Machin sitting up at night . . . Fawnie disporting herself on the front lawn . . . the infant, the Lord only knew what he was doing. Tomorrow, when it was not so hot he must send Fawnie away somewhere. He imagined how, under that white dress, her shoulders were still covered with welts. . . . That night Mrs. Machin again took up her position beside the lamp on the dresser. Too exhausted to knit, she sat with clasped hands staring fixedly at her grotesque shadow on the wall.

"You know, you are going to make yourself ill," whispered Derek, vehemently, from the bottom of the stairs.

"There are worse things than illness—or death," she retorted.

And, once more, there being nothing to say, Derek went to bed.

2.

The heat still held. When he came out of his room the next morning at seven, it seemed like a ferocious noonday. Lake and sky seemed merged into some dazzling new element that bewildered and exhausted.

He sat down at the breakfast table and rested his head

on his hand. Then he heard the kitchen door open, and raised his eyes to see whether it were Mrs. Machin or Phœbe who was to wait on him.

It was Mrs. Machin but, instead of the black dress and large white apron, which he expected, she wore a silk cape with a shiny jet trimming and a bonnet that tied under her chin. His first thought was, "She will suffocate in those things"; then, as he realized what she was up to, he said, sternly: "Mrs. Machin, if you have it in your mind to leave me, you had better think twice before you do such a foolish thing. I am going to arrange things very differently today."

"You can arrange things anyway you like," she said, violently. "It don't matter to me. I'm shut of the whole affair. My month was up day before yesterday, and I'll make you a present of the last two days and nights of misery. You've disgraced Grimstone. Your uncle made the mistake of his life when he left the fortune to a headstrong good-for-naught like you've turned out to be."

"That's pretty hard talk, Mrs. Machin." He felt, not so much anger at her words as dismay and sadness at the thought of losing this faithful old servant.

"It's a case for hard talk, and hard thoughts, too. Here I've worked for the Vales for over fifty years, till my hands are all knuckles, and what is my reward? I've got to get out for shame at the carryings-on here, and with a squaw girl at that."

"Very well, Mrs. Machin. If you won't listen to my explanation you can go. But I expect to see you back here inside of a week, and whenever you come I'll be willing to forget the hard things you've said to me, if you'll promise—"

"I won't promise nothing, and I won't come back."

With a defiant stare from her oyster-coloured eyes, she marched out of the room.

Phœbe tiptoed in, as to a chamber of death, and brought him his porridge. But, after a few mouthfuls, he pushed the plate away, and got up. He went out to the flagged yard and stood staring at the bent figures of the pickers in the strawberry beds. The shrieks of pigs that were having their snouts ringed came from the direction of Chard's farm. How beastly uncomfortable to have a ring put through one's nose on a stewing hot day like this! He had seen Chard do it once; the pig standing upright before him, its front feet on his chest, its shrieks full in his face, as he stood with his inexorable, pale grin, driving the iron skillfully home.

The sun blazed on his bare head, the flags burned his feet. Mrs. Machin came out of the house and turned down the drive.

"I wouldn't take a man off to drive me into Mistwell," she called back, "so I'm walkin'. I've told Snailem to fetch my trunk when he takes the fruit in."

Before Derek had time to reply, a window was thrown open upstairs, and Fawnie's voice cried, derisively,

"Get along out, ole woman! We don' want you. Hurry up, now."

Mrs. Machin, her face contorted with rage, stared up, speechless, at the window a moment, and then rushed through the gate, the picture of black and impotent fury.

A delighted chuckle came from above. Derek strode around under the window and looked up. She was sitting on the sill, half-dressed, her arms and shoulders brown as a nut in the sun, her small, red mouth open in laughter, her bronze-coloured eyes dancing with triumph.

"Fawnie, Fawnie, you're a little devil. You ought to be whipped." But he laughed in spite of himself.

"Whippin' don' do me no good. But it does me good to see that ole woman runnin' down the road, like a ole black sheep. . . . Baby an' me, we're sittin' in the sun. See." She picked up the child from somewhere and holding him under her arm, suspended him out of the window. He was stark naked. His massive, infantile legs dangled feebly, and he stared, blinking, at Derek, with an air of benign jollity.

"Don't let him fall," said Vale, anxiously.

"I jus' wanted you to see how big he is. Ain't it fonny he's our little baby?"

"Very funny." He stared at the child with grim curiosity. It was indeed larger and lustier than he had thought from the glimpse two days ago. He felt neither remorse nor shame in looking at it; rather pride in its lustiness. Yet he felt ashamed because he felt no shame.

3.

With the departure of Mrs. Machin a change took place in the atmosphere of Grimstone. Instead of the feeling of impending storm, a feeling of reckless holiday was born. Phœbe piled up her breakfast dishes without washing them and lounged to the fields with Hughie. Snailem tramped about the kitchen in boots caked with manure, and stewed himself a pot of strong tea in the middle of the morning. Even Jock, the collie, seemed to realize that the strong hand of discipline had relaxed its grip, for Derek found him sleeping comfortably curled up on the sofa in the parlour.

The heat had not penetrated there as it had into the rest of the house. There was even a damp sort of chill that made one shiver after the hot glare out of doors. Having pushed Jock off the sofa Derek lay down himself. His head ached, and he rammed it into an incomfortable beaded

cushion, because the green and white beads in the design of a laurel wreath looked cool. The light that came between the green curtains was restful. Jock was making a very soothing sound licking his paws. Derek began to get drowsy. . . .

He had had a sort of cat nap when he was roused by Phœbe. She was bending over him, whispering, her face close to his. The pupils of her eyes seemed to jig with excitement behind her thick spectacles. "Wake up," she whispered, hoarsely, "Chard and the minister from Mistwell's outside waitin' to see ye."

"To see me? What for?"

Phœbe regarded him sorrowfully. "Can't ye guess?" She pointed dramatically to the room above.

Derek reddened and sat up with dishevelled hair. "If that's the case, I'll make short work of them. Show them in, Phœbe."

Phœbe, heavy with importance, stamped out. He heard her trip on the step that led to the dining room, and he pictured how she would plunge across the floor. A moment more and his neighbour and the minister stood before him.

"You are energetic, making calls on a morning like this," said Derek, cheerfully. "Won't you sit down?"

The two men stared about the room, obviously taken aback at being received in such state. Then Chard, with his pale grin, said, "Allow me to introduce my friend and pastor, Mr. Barker, Mr. Vale."

Derek recognized Mr. Barker as the minister who had played the autoharp at the funeral of Solomon Sharroe. With his oily skin and opaque dark eyes, he looked rather like an unpleasant foreigner. He took Derek's hand in his and held it in a fervent grasp.

"Mr. Vale," he said, "I wish I might have met you first in the little church where we worship. But, better late than

never. I hope I am not too late to turn you from the evil you have fallen into."

Derek extricated his hand. "I don't think you quite realize," he said, trying to keep his temper, "what you are taking upon yourself. You come into the house of a stranger and make an accusation against him without any other grounds for your suspicion than the stupid gossip of ignorant people."

"You can scarcely call Brother Chard stupid and ignorant," reproved Mr. Barker, "and he suspects the worst."

"What the devil do you suspect?" asked Derek turning on Chard.

"Well, Mr. Vale," said Chard, uncovering once more his neat rows of artificial teeth, "I've a pretty good idea who's the parent of that black baby with the white hair upstairs."

"It's not black," said Derek, testily. "It's bronze. And it doesn't concern you if it's all the colours of the rainbow. Now I'm trying to keep my temper, but I strongly advise you men to stick to your autoharp and plough, and leave me to manage my affairs in my own way."

"I have my wife and family to think of," said Chard. "This is putting the whole neighbourhood under a cloud. I have to try to keep my children's minds pure. They are hearing words they haven't any right to hear."

"It's terrible for their pure little minds to be sullied," murmured Mr. Barker.

"What sort of words?" asked Derek.

"Well, Mr. Vale," replied Chard, a yellowish flush creeping over his face, "concubine for one. My second youngest boy was saying that you have a concubine in here."

"Surely that touches you, Mr. Vale," said the minister.

"It makes me sick," said Derek. "In fact you both make me sick. You had better go."

"You are a headstrong young man," said Mr. Barker, "and you are going to wreck your life. Better bring the woman right down here and I'll marry you and make it legal. Remember, too, that no sin is so dark but it can be washed white by the Blood."

A lusty cry came from the baby in the room above.

Chard's grin became painfully wide. Mr. Barker took a dingy white handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. Derek went to the door and opened it. "Phœbe," he said, "show these gentlemen out."

As Chard passed Derek, he said:

"If you think you've heard the last of this you're mistaken. If you think you can live a licentious life here, and not be interfered with you're mistaken. All Mistwell is aroused. . . ."

As soon as she had got rid of the two men Phœbe came back to the parlour, shutting the heavy door carefully behind her, before she spoke.

"Don't you worry, master, for Hughie and me'll stand by ye in spite of these old curmudgeons with all their talk about columbines. I was brung up in a norphan asylum, but I know the world, and I know a gentleman's got to have a little margin. That's what I said to Hughie last night—'a gentleman's got to have a margin if it's ever so.' So they don't frighten me with their columbines."

4.

Derek pitched hay in the field with Hugh all afternoon, and the hard exercise in the heat brought calm to his mind; he smiled at the recollection of the call from Chard and the Reverend Barker. It was good to work among the warm, sun-dried hay; he liked the smell of the baked earth, of the glistening, round flanks of the horses, of Hugh's healthy,

sweating young body. He liked, too, to drive the heavy, lurching load into the barn where it was dim after the glare outside, and fowls ran cackling out of the way of the horses' hoofs.

When they had brought in the last load Derek went to the house, Jock at his heels. He saw Phœbe and Fawnie sitting by the kitchen table drinking tea. The sun touched with mellow light the white, scrubbed wood of the table, the loaf of good bread, the brown, shiny teapot, and the red pot of jam. The two girls were leaning over their cups, laughing and whispering together.

Vale had a plunge in the lake, and, after his tea, sat with a book in the porch, till dark. He felt that he was neglecting his farm accounts, which must be getting in a bad state, but he was too sleepy and warm to undertake them tonight. He heard Phœbe and the men go to their rooms, one by one; he heard Fawnie murmuring some little lullaby to her baby. He thought he would not go to bed till the night air had found its way into the house and cooled it.

About ten o'clock he dropped into a doze in his chair. His book slipped from his knees and his head sank forward. . . . He thought a storm must have arisen, for he was awakened by a moaning, roaring sound. He sat up drowsily at first, and then straightened himself with a start, as something heavy fell almost at his feet on the steps. The roaring rose again like a wave, and was shattered into howls and yells about the gate. He got up and peered into the blackness. He could see a dark huddle of figures by the second's flash of an electric torch. Then a second stone rattled on the roof of the porch and struck sharply on the flagstones below. Derek ran down the steps and half-way along the walk. "Who is there?" he called,

sharply. "What are you doing?" His questions were greeted with a prolonged hoot. Someone began to beat on a tin pan.

Then a voice bawled, "Where's your fancy girl?" and another, "Bring out your squaw!"

Derek walked firmly to the gate. He tried to speak, but his voice was drowned in yells and catcalls. The same voice kept bawling,

"Where's your fancy girl? Let's see your squaw baby."

The man who held the electric torch turned it suddenly on Derek. There was a howl of delighted laughter. As it subsided, a cockney voice said, "Wot a tableau 'e mikes!" More derisive laughter followed, then, out of the blackness, a clod of earth spun, and struck Derek on the head.

An instant later the house door banged and Hugh McKay came running down the walk.

"What's the trouble, sir?" he panted.

"Those blackguards," answered Derek, in a voice heavy with passion, "are giving me a sort of charivari."

"I'm no surprised. Bob Gunn told me the oldest Chard boy said they were gaein' to mak' things hot for ye."

"Go to bed, Scotty! Go to bed!" yelled the rowdies. "Take your boss with you, too." An obscene remark followed, then a shower of sticks and stones.

"Shall we rush them, sir?" asked Hugh, wiping a trickle of blood from his cheek.

"Yes. Keep close together, and let them have it."

Derek swung open the gate. He and Hugh, without waiting for the rabble to recover from their surprise, flung themselves upon them in all the exuberance of their strong young manhood.

For a few moments the serenaders surged about them and showed some fight, but it was soon over. The dark mass of figures coiled and uncoiled in the road, then

streamed like a snake towards Mistwell. Derek had snatched one of their own sticks, and savagely belaboured the shoulders of the stragglers. Hugh encountered the cockney who stumbled away, sobbing, "Ow, 'es' broke my naose, the brute!"

Derek could distinguish two figures running towards Chard's gate. Hugh was already in pursuit of them. Derek jumped the ditch, and, bounding along beside the palings, captured the hindermost just as he threw one leg over the fence. It was Bob Gunn.

"Well, you miserable little sweep," said Derek grasping him by the collar, "so this is the way you make me sorry I wouldn't take you back."

"I was just lookin' on," muttered Bob.

"You'll find that it's not safe to look on at me," said Derek, and, administering a kick that sent him sprawling, he let him go.

Hugh caught up to him as he reached his gate.

"Did you get your man, Hugh? Who was he?"

"Chard's eldest son, sir."

"What did you do with him?"

"I made him greet."

This summer, as had happened last summer, because of the lack of help, the grass on the south side of the house had grown tall and rank, while the lawn at the front and the tennis court at the north had been rather well cared for. Now the grass was cut, and raked into a great sweet-smelling mound close to the house. On it Derek had thrown himself when Hugh went back to bed, and lay, tingling with the excitement of the sally. He wished the Mistwell ruffians had not been so easily routed. He should have liked to prolong the ecstasy of those barbarous moments. He recalled the feel of his knuckles against someone's jaw in the dark, and the sound of heavy breathing and shuffling

feet and finally the thudding on the hard road of the retreat.

The sky hung low, powdered with stars, and the rim of the waning moon rose above the lake. And at his back the solid walls of old Grimstone. He liked to think the walls of Grimstone were at his back. . . . His back to the wall with all those curs of Mistwell yapping before him.

He thought of his brother and laughed. How disgusted Edmund would be with him! But he believed he was of coarser fibre than Edmund. He could not imagine his taking up with an Indian girl. He might have admired her, felt her charm—for a moment—but nothing more. He would not have been enchanted by her strangeness, as of some creature of the wildwood, he would not have been allured by those sliding velvet eyes.

The front door softly opened and in the shaft of light he saw Fawnie step out into the porch. She had on a yellow dress, a faded yellow he had seen by daylight, but now it looked as though it had been spun from the moon. Her hair was about her shoulders and she was barefooted. She peered about, plainly in search of him, but he kept still. As well try to hide from a soft-footed animal with the instincts of the forest. In a moment she was padding across the grass to him.

She leaned over him, looking inquiringly into his face.

"Did you get hurt, Durek?"

"No. I hurt some of those brutes, though."

She clapped her hands delightedly. "I'm glad, Durek. I wish you would have took an axe and chopped their heads off. Can I sit down aside you?"

"Yes. Sit down. It's cool out here. Were you frightened, Fawnie?"

"Yes, I was. My little heart she was like a fox hidin' in her hole from the dogs." She had dropped to the mound

of grass beside him and, with her arms under her head, stared up at the glimmering sky. "I'm always scared when I'm not with you, Durek."

"Why, Fawnie, you told me once that you were not afraid of anything, or anyone."

"Ah, that was 'fore I get my baby. All those fellas from Mistwell, they would ha' torn me to pieces, surely."

"Nonsense. They only came to make an infernal row."

"Well, Durek, I don' like those informal rows. They sound like hell marchin' down the road. You won't turn baby an' me out, will you?"

"Don't worry, Fawnie, you are going to be taken care of." He stared down at her face, in its frame of rich, dark hair, her slanting eyes holding a gleam of moonlight in their depths, her slender bare ankles crossed on the odourous grass. It was soothing to lie beside her there in the troubled shadow of old Grimstone, and watch the moon like a pale petal wafted across the sky.

"I was in swimmin,' too." Her voice had changed, and had a little husky note. "I was in swimmin' that place where the sand's all wavy. It made me cool as cool. Feel." She laid one supple, cool, little hand on his throat. "Do you like the way that feels, Durek?"

CHAPTER III

"For such persons—"

1.

There was no sign of a break in the weather. The sun that had dropped behind the orchard in a hot turbulence of colour last night, rose from the lake, as from a brazen pool, like a warrior refreshed. The fruit was drying; the sand was like hot metal under the feet; even the fowls clustered together in the shade with parted beaks.

Derek saw with satisfaction that the pickers were hard at work. As he waited for his breakfast, he calculated on the back of an envelope what the proceeds of yesterday's shipment would be. He thought he was not doing badly. Snailem had told him that Chard had not shipped as much. He was determined that Mrs. Machin should hear good accounts of the fruit. She had the idea, he knew, that things would go to smash without her. He had refused hot food, and Phœbe brought him a bowl of strawberries and thick cream. Cream flowed freely those days at Grimstone; Vale wondered sometimes where the next churning of butter was to come from. Phœbe creaked in and out waiting on him. She wore red knitted slippers and white cotton stockings that wrinkled about her thick ankles. Her cheeks vied with the strawberries and cream in freshness and colour.

As Derek divided the strawberries with his spoon, disclosing the sweet pink hearts of them which rapidly were smothered in cream, he heard Fawnie's voice, singing to her child. "It must be hot upstairs," he thought, "under the

roof," and he had a desire to see Fawnie eating strawberries at the table beside him. He went, napkin in hand to the foot of the stairs.

"Fawnie," he called, "Won't you come down and have some strawberries with me? I've twice too many."

"Yes. I'll come this minute. I'm hungry. But this fonny little child he don' want to go to sleep. His eyes is as bright as bright."

"Lay him on the bed."

"Yes, I will. Now you go to sleep, Abner, like a good little boy."

"What was it you called him?" Vale asked, as she came down the stairs.

"Abner. Don' you think that is a nice name?"

"No. I think it is a milksop name. Call him something picturesque—colourful."

"Durek, then?"

"Lord, no. I'll think up a name while we eat our strawberries."

Fawnie was in love with the idea of sitting at table with Derek. She clapped her hands, and ran around the table twice, like a little brown bird fluttering about a bough, before she settled in her chair. Then she said, with hands flat on the tablecloth on either side of her plate:

"I must not spill crumbs, nor slop tea on this nice white cloth, or you'll kill me, won't you Durek?"

"I surely will. Now have some buttered toast, Fawnie, or perhaps you like scones."

"I'll have toast. We never have toast. Just Maw's bread that she bakes in the fryin' pan."

She helped herself to toast. Phœbe had buttered it so thickly that the butter oozed through to the other side. Fawnie set her teeth in it, laughing over it with narrowed eyes at Derek.

"What you going to call our baby?" she demanded with her mouth full.

"I have it. Buckskin. That's a jolly name. It means something. Suits a little Indian boy. Makes you think of Nipigon, Timagami, wild things, and the smell of gunpowder and wood smoke. Abner makes you think of hair oil, creaky boots, and Sunday-school leaflets, eh?"

Fawnie stared at him with the expression of an intelligent child. "I understand," she said. "But I think he'll be an awful bad little boy if we call him Buckskin. . . . Buckskin Vale, h'm . . ." She stopped eating and stared straight before her, as though savouring the name.

Phœbe, coming in with a jug of hot water to replenish the pot, started in amazement at seeing Fawnie seated at the table with Vale. Catching her toe on the doorsill she stumbled into the room slopping the water as she came. A drop fell on Jock's long feathered tail that projected from under the table and he fled howling out of doors. Derek looked up crossly at her, and Fawnie said:

"Say, you're awful stupid this morning, Phœbe. Haven't you ever seen a lady and gentleman eatin' hot toast before?"

"A gentleman must have a margin, if it's ever so, as I said to Hughie," declared Phœbe, addressing Vale, "but the margin's getting wider and wider."

" ' 'Tis not so wide as a church door nor so deep as a well but 'twill suffice'," boomed Snailem from the kitchen. "Which is from Shakespeare as always hits the mark."

A pleasant voice came from outside. The owner of it was sympathizing deeply with Jock who wriggled on his belly towards someone who approached. Vale leaned back in his chair to look through the open door. He saw Mr. Ramsey pushing his bicycle over the flagstones. He stared, stupefied, at the advancing figure which in grey Norfolk

suit and white straw sailor hat, stood for Church, and order, and the accepted sacraments.

Phœbe stared, too, in gaping consternation. As Mr. Ramsey, having stood his wheel against the rail of the verandah, filled the doorway with his well-knit figure, she went towards him, hot water kettle in hand.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "I hope as you haven't come here to talk about columbines and such! Because Mr. Vale reely don't deserve it. If ever there was a well-meaning young man it's him, and, as I said to Hughie, a gentleman must have a margin if it's ever so." She would have proceeded, even more recklessly, but a dribble of scalding water from the kettle she held fell on her woolen slipper and brought her up with an exclamation of pain.

"Phœbe," said Derek, desperately, "please go to the kitchen and shut the door after you."

Phœbe, feeling that she was in disgrace, hurried from the room, and, tripping once more over the doorsill, was precipitated into the kitchen. Snailem caught her, and carefully closed the door upon them.

Mr. Ramsey turned with a cheerful smile to Derek. "Quite a character, that girl," he said. "Most amusing. I was positive she was going to baptize me with that boiling water. . . . How nice and cool you are here. It's frightful out of doors."

"Won't you sit down?" said Derek, regaining his outward composure, "and have some breakfast? You're out early." He looked at Fawnie anxiously, and she, meeting his eyes, divined that he would be rid of her. With an odd dignity, she stood up in her narrow blue dress, and said in her low voice, "I guess I take my tea and scone upstairs and finish it there, eh?"

"Thanks, Fawnie," said Derek; and Mr. Ramsey with

an amused little bow opened the door into the hallway and smiled at her as she passed through.

"Won't you have some breakfast?" repeated Derek, feeling that by eating, the evil moment might be delayed.

"Thank you, no. I had breakfast at Hickson's. I went there early to give the Communion to old Mr. Hickson who is dangerously ill. And afterwards I had my breakfast." Derek saw then that he carried a small black bag.

Mr. Ramsey stared at the remains of the breakfast in silence for a moment, then he turned his deep-set grey eyes on Derek's face with a look of intense scrutiny. "So that is the girl," he said with a new harsh note in his voice.

"What do you mean by calling her 'the girl,' as though I had done something tremendous and irrevocable?" demanded Derek resentfully.

"Well, haven't you?" returned Mr. Ramsey, on a deep note. "It is rather tremendous, isn't it, to bring a young girl into your house under such circumstances? Rather irrevocable to bring a son into the world?"

Derek strode up and down the room, and at last paused before the china greyhound on the chimney-piece, and looked into its immobile face. "Such things have been done before," he said.

"Not often. Can you recall a case among your acquaintances? And never without consequences."

"Look here," interrupted Derek. "Did you come here as a friend, or not?"

"Absolutely as a friend." Mr. Ramsey came and stood beside him. "A friend above all things. Not to rebuke nor to give advice, but to help, if possible."

"Well, sir," said Derek, looking at him steadily, "Put yourself in my place."

Mr. Ramsey flushed a little. "Yes," he said drily.

"What could I do? There was that poor young thing beaten into welts by an old hag—was threatened even worse things. I brought her here simply to save her skin. The child had to come too. Then my housekeeper got wild, talked about my criminal actions to the world in general, and left me. Next thing Chard and the minister from Mistwell came and insulted me—ordered me to put the girl out—or marry her. Would you have been baited by them? Then that affair last night—a bunch of rowdies —would any decent fellow submit to their bullying?"

"It is true that your position has been frightfully difficult. You must not think, my dear fellow, that I am insensible to that. What I have come for this morning is to help you, if possible, to a better understanding with yourself, and with those who hold your friendship as something very dear."

"Do you mean the Jerrolds?"

"Yes, and myself, of course."

"Have you spoken of this to them?"

"Mr. Jerrold and I have talked it over. He is laid up with lumbago, you know. I should have shunned the subject with Miss Jerrold, but she brought it up herself as I was leaving yesterday."

Derek picked up the china greyhound and turned it in his hand, waiting for the Vicar to go on.

"She was very much upset," said Mr. Ramsey, in a low voice.

"Yes. I suppose she would be. I suppose she'll never want to speak to me again, eh?" His hand shook a little as he carefully set the dog on the oval mark its base had made in the dust film on the mantelpiece.

"I shouldn't like to think that. I do think that she has every hope that you will make what restitution you can."

Vale stared at him uncomprehending, and the Vicar went

on, "She said to me that she was positive you would do the right thing by the girl."

"Provide for her?"

"In the only way possible."

"Come now, Mr. Ramsey," said Vale with heat, "you don't expect me to believe that Grace Jerrold thinks I should marry Fawnie."

"I think she hopes intensely that you will."

Derek struck the mantelpiece with his closed hand. "It's the most preposterous thing I ever heard of. Because I made a fool of myself—a beast if you like—once, she expects me to pay for it for the rest of my life. All men are fools—beasts sometimes. Perhaps not actually, but in thought. No one knows about them. Every one knows of this, and I am willing to face the consequences. But that does not mean I am willing to tie myself to an ignorant Indian girl."

"I suppose she was thinking about your son. I confess that is what troubles me, too."

"Good God! I will provide for him! But marry her. . . . Oh, I know how you look at it. . . . I was strictly brought up. . . . I know the phrase—the woman you wronged—I take the blame—but marry her!" The blood rushed to his head at the mere thought of such a marriage; at the thought, too, of Grace Jerrold discussing his wrongdoing with the Vicar. What a horrible mess he had got into! How was he to get out? He did not know what way to turn. Mrs. Machin, Chard, the minister, the Mistwell folk, the Jerrolds, Mr. Ramsey, they were all banded together to bait him. He felt bewildered. His eyes looked strange as he faced the Vicar.

"Don't get excited, my dear fellow. Remember I am here to help you. I want you to realize the elemental truths of the affair. Even if you give the girl money and

send her away with the child, what will become of him? Try to picture his life—the life of your own flesh and blood. He is no common Indian. He has the blood of your mother—your father—your uncle who gave you this place. If you supplied his mother with money, do you suppose her family would ever let her be? She would be their prey. Your son would be knocked about by some low half-breed, probably. Think of him as a ragged, dirty, ignorant youth coming to pick berries some day at Grimstone, the home of his fathers. As for the girl—Fawnie, is it?—she is pretty, intelligent, a direct descendant of Tecumseh, I believe, and she cannot be repulsive to you or you would not have been eating your breakfast so happily with her as I came in." Mr. Ramsey's clean-shaven lips parted in a slightly derisive smile.

Derek flushed deeply. More than ever, he felt cut, bewildered. Now he could not bear the Vicar's keen eyes. He went to the door and looked out on the blinding surface of the lake. A wave of heat like the breath of a furnace beat in upon him. He glanced at the thermometer hanging in the shade on the verandah. The mercury touched 102 degrees. No wonder he felt bewildered. He put his hand to his head. Strange pains were tormenting the back of his neck. He could not think. And yet thoughts were gnawing at his brain like rats gnawing to get free of a trap. There seemed to be no air to breathe. A black schooner was passing, trailing a streamer of sooty black smoke. . . . He was roused by the sound of a shuffling step on the flags. It was old Mrs. Sharroe. She gave him an imperturbably hostile stare as she passed. He thought of gentle Fawnie at her mercy. Of his son, poor little beggar, at her mercy. He remembered the feel of those welts on Fawnie's shoulders and turned sick with repugnance. He wheeled back into the room and could scarcely make out Mr. Ramsey's

figure, still standing by the fireplace, for the strange jigging in his eyes. He was afraid that Mr. Ramsey would begin talking again. Anything seemed better than more talk. Words beat so on a fellow's brain. Like the heat, only worse. . . . We'll have done with all this talk, then, he thought and he said heavily:

"All right. I'll marry her—since everybody thinks I should."

He could never rightly remember that drive to Mistwell to buy the license. He knew that a motor had passed them once and covered them with dust, and he remembered the glare of a red and yellow sign by the roadside advertising fur coats and wraps. The man who sold him the license had seemed but half awake. He had yawned in open boredom as he asked questions and filled in blanks. Only Mr. Ramsey seemed cool, alert, masterful.

He talked cheerfully and kindly to Derek on the way homeward, and before parting advised him almost in the tone of a doctor to take care not to expose himself to the heat, but to keep quiet and cool until he should return in the afternoon to perform the ceremony.

2.

He looked at the table after the Vicar had gone and wondered what meal it was that he had been eating a while ago. He took up the teapot and poured himself a little tea. It was tepid and bitter, not what he wanted. From the cupboard under the stairs he got a bottle of Scotch whiskey and half filled a tumbler, adding cold water from the pump outside. He drank it slowly and his brain felt clearer, but he wanted to be alone to think—if possible.

He went to the parlour and stretched himself on the sofa, his burning head pressed against the unfriendly beaded cushion. But, instead of thinking he became drowsy and

slept. In his dreams the air was full of yells and hoots, and the beating of tin pans.

He was awakened by the pain in the back of his neck. He had been dreaming something about the Indians. Oh, yes, they had been going to hang him from a tree in the orchard. Jammery had just placed the rope about his neck. Mr. Ramsey had been there in his surplice, reading the burial service, and a mob of Mistwell fellows were making a frightful row. He felt dazed. Then, suddenly, he remembered everything.

No one would expect him to keep such a promise. He had hardly known what he was saying. He made up his mind that he would go straight to Mr. Jerrold and talk it over with him. And, if he met Grace, he would speak frankly to her, as she had spoken to Mr. Ramsey. He pictured himself putting the matter before her plainly, almost brutally, yet withal throwing himself upon her mercy, making her feel that she above all others, could save him from the disaster.

He got his hat and went out by the front door. The road was deserted except for a speckled hen who was taking a dust bath with tempestuous energy, just outside the gate. She ceased for a moment as he passed and gazed up at him with a hard yellow eye. She lay on her side, every feather on end, and one scaly leg stiffly extended in the dust. Fearing some passing motor car might kill her, Derek pushed her gently with his foot and sent her, dishevelled and angry, through the gateway.

As he passed over the bridge he noticed that the stream had gone almost dry. Out of the shiny ooze of the pool grotesque spotted lilies seemed to stare up at him with little yellow eyes like the hen's. The sloping field beyond the stream was a shimmering sea of oats, their bluish stalks bending and whispering under a faint hot breeze.

He hesitated, listening to that drowsy, sibilant music, and did not notice the approach of a vehicle until it was almost upon him. Looking up, as the driver turned his horses aside, he looked straight into the face of Grace Jerrold.

She was alone save for the groom who sat on the seat before her. She was in a thin white dress and held a green silk parasol above her bright uncovered head.

Derek started forward, shamefaced, yet eager. He thought, instantly, he would climb in beside her and pour out the whole miserable business into her ears. The driver drew up his horses, and looked over his shoulder, expecting an order to stop. But, instead, she gave him a little nod to go on, and, after one sorrowful look into the expectant eyes raised to hers, turned her face away, and stared across the lake.

The carriage passed. Now the glistening green parasol hid her from view. She had dropped it on her shoulder, either to hide herself from the contamination of his gaze, or from faintness perhaps. It did not matter. She had cut him. He scarcely seemed able to take that in as he stood in the dust of the wheels.

All he wanted now was to get home, to escape from the glare of the road into the dim shade of the parlour. There he would sit until Mr. Ramsey's return. He had said he would be back about three. He would sit there quietly till Mr. Ramsey came, and then he would tell him of his unchangeable decision not to marry the girl.

He began quickly to retrace his steps. Two little girls in clumsy pinafores met him and whispered together behind their hands. Then they began to laugh hysterically, and ran past him clutching each other. When he reached his own gate, the hen was exactly where he had first found her, taking a second dust bath.

In the house all was quiet. He shut himself in the parlour with the bottle of Scotch, and, when Phœbe called him to dinner, he said he had a headache and did not want to be disturbed. Upstairs Fawnie sang the same song over and over to her baby.

3.

"But my dear fellow," said Mr. Ramsey, anxiously, "you look very flushed. I hope you have not been exerting in the heat."

"Sitting here all day."

"Then I am afraid you're not quite well. But it's enough to make anyone ill. I'm sure I have sweated five pounds off pedalling those seven miles from Brancepeth three times to-day." But he still looked quite fresh. And he spoke with cheerful matter-of-factness.

"Is Miss Fawnie ready?" he asked.

"Who the devil? Oh, yes—Miss Fawnie. I've not told her yet," Derek replied stupidly.

"Not told her? Oh, my dear fellow! Do you want me to? Shall I?" His tone was that of one who indulges a petulant child.

"No. The fact is—" What was the fact? For the life of him he could not tell. The one fact he seemed able to grasp was that Grace had turned her face from him that morning in the road. All else seemed a stupid bungle from which he was too tired to extricate himself.

"Do you want me to tell her?" repeated Mr. Ramsey.

"No. I'll go. I don't care. Tell her if you like."

"Very well. I'll leave you the ring. You remember you asked me to buy it? A very nice one, I think. I'll make the service as short as I can, since you are not well. Upstairs is she? I hear her voice. She sings very sweetly."

Derek heard him decisively mount the stairs, then came the sound of a knock, followed by his vibrant, pleasant

speech with Fawnie. Shortly he descended and put his head in at the parlour door. "It's all right," he said. "She will be down directly. Wanted to change her blouse. May I go in your room, Derek, old fellow—" it was his first use of the Christian name—"to slip my surplice on? Thanks, very much. I'll be with you directly. Nice little ring, isn't it? Narrow, yet heavy."

Derek dropped the ring stolidly into the pocket of his jacket. His eyes were on Jock, who had just come in from out of doors. He was panting jerkily, and Derek thought—"I must have him clipped. But by someone who knows. I don't want his fine coat all jagged up."

The Vicar had called Phœbe and Hugh McKay as witnesses, and they now came in, standing shyly at the far end of the room. They seemed overcome by the turn things had taken. Phœbe had exchanged her woolen slippers for shiny buttoned boots, which pinched her cruelly as she stood, balancing from one foot to the other.

Derek got slowly to his feet as Mr. Ramsey, like some impressive vessel in full sail, entered in his surplice. Fawnie, frightened, yet elated, followed him. She had once seen a wedding in the English Church at Brancepeth, and was determined to be as orthodox in her attire as that other bride married by Mr. Ramsey. Desperately eager to wear a veil, her eyes had fallen on the fine white net curtains Mrs. Machin had recently hung at the window. Quick as thought she had mounted a chair and unfastened the brass pins of one curtain. No fair bride, arranging the folds of the Brussels lace veil her grandmother had worn beneath a chaplet of pearls, could have been thrilled by a pride more delicious than that felt by Fawnie as she glimpsed the dark glow of her eyes and the pouting red of her lips behind the starched white net.

She looked so pretty as she came into the parlour, that

Derek was roused for a moment from his lethargy and smiled at her. Mr. Ramsey looked at the veil dubiously, then his brow cleared, and, with a tolerant smile he motioned them to their place before him. Jock sniffed the billowing surplice, but obeyed Hugh's deep-voiced injunction, "Sit ye doon, Jock."

Mr. Ramsey opened his prayer-book and began the service in a hurried, muffled voice, soothing to the ear. Derek John took Fawnie Pearl by the right hand, and promised, rather unintelligibly, to have and to hold her from that day forward, for better for worse. Fawnie Pearl took Derek John by his right hand, and promised in her husky little voice (not understanding a word of it) to have and to hold him, to love, cherish, and obey him, from that day forward, till death did them part. Then Derek, without flurry or confusion, produced the ring and put it on the taper third finger of the too supple brown hand, and they were man and wife. Jock stretched himself and yawned. Hugh drew a deep sigh, and Mr. Ramsey wished them great joy.

But Buckskin, upstairs, broke into angry cries, as though protesting against the union of those two fond strangers who had given him being.

4.

Derek and Fawnie were sitting side by side on the sofa in the parlour. They were alone. Late sunlight was slanting between the chinks in the shutters. A solemn hush hung over the house. The atmosphere created by Mr. Ramsey's cassock and surplice still brooded there.

"My goodness," said Fawnie, thinking aloud. "He looked terr'ble nice in them wraps, almost like God. And he had a big ring with a shiny black stone—and I couldn't tell a word he said. I never saw anyone as much like God. But I don' like his big ring half as well as my nice ring."

She turned her graceful little hand before his face. He noticed that she wore a gold bangle bracelet.

"You have a bracelet, too," he observed. "Where did you get that, Fawnie?"

She quickly hid her wrist in the folds of her dress and broke into a chuckling laugh. "I'll tell you some day. Not now. I'll tell you sometime when I want to make you laugh. But not now. Now I jus' want to sit still and get used to things. I'm pretty near scared o' this big room, and the pianner, and all the pictures starin' at me. Who's that fonny woman with the lace cap and mittens?"

"My great-grandmother."

"Is it put on with paint?"

"Yes. An oil painting."

"Oh. Where was it made?"

"In Devon."

"Is that near Halifax?"

"No. It's in England."

"I know where England is. It's up at a place where the king lives."

"Yes."

"I don' like the way she stares at us, do you?"

"Not exactly."

"What do you s'pose she's thinkin'?"

"Nothing very pleasant."

"No, nothing very pleasant. She's mad, I think, and jealous of me sittin' here in my yaller dress with a gold ring, and a gold bracelet, and a white veil, with a nice young man beside me. She wishes she could hop right out of that picture and tear us apart, eh?"

"Shouldn't be surprised."

"But you can't do it, ole lady, so jus' be good or I'll turn your face to the wall. . . . Put your head on my shoulder, Durek, you look awful sleepy."

CHAPTER IV

Dolce Domum

1.

*P*hœbe was sweeping the flagged yard next morning when a trap driven by one of Mr. Jerrold's men turned up the drive and stopped with a flourish. But it was with no flourish that Mr. Jerrold himself descended, rather with the wincing and suppressed groans of one stiff with lumbago. Leaning on a stick, he came towards her, his dark brow puckered.

"Is Mr. Vale in?" he asked.

"He is indeed, sir," answered Phœbe, leaning on her broom and speaking breathlessly, "and I suppose you've heard of the goings on here. He's never stirred out of the parlour since yesterday morning, and he must be drunk as a lord now with all the whiskey he's carried in there. And as for that Fawnie—and it goes against the grain for me to 'Mrs. Vale' her—she's getting so arrogant there's no knowing what she'll do. This morning she carries down a bundle of soiled clothes and tells me to wash 'em. 'Here, Phœbe, you wash these clothes and see you wash 'em clean,' says she. Oh, I like her cheek, I do. 'Me wash for a Nindian!' says I. 'Am I Mrs. Vale or ain't I?' says she. 'You do what I say or you can get out.' That's the way she talked to me, sir, and if you was to have got out of that trap and hit me over the head with a bludgeon, I shouldn't have been knocked more of a heap. A gentleman must have a margin, as I say to Hughie, but when it comes to a Nindian wife . . . ."

"And did you wash the clothes?"

"I did, sir, and there they hang on the line enough to scare the crows with their rags an' tags."

"It's too bad," said Mr. Jerrold, commiseratingly, "but do the best you can for Mr. Vale's sake."

"Shall I tell him you're here, sir?"

"No, I'll go straight in."

He limped to the door of the parlour and opened it, after tapping on the panel.

The shutters were closed and the room lay in a stuffy haze of tobacco smoke. He felt sure that Vale had put a decanter out of sight at the sound of his rap. Certainly he smelled strongly of whiskey and looked as though he had slept in his clothes.

"Phew," said Mr. Jerrold, "may I open a window? There's a breeze rising outside that's not half bad. We're in for a devil of a storm. As a matter of fact I doubt whether the rain will be in time to save the crops. There. Isn't that nice?" He had thrown open the shutters and a breeze, fresh and uneasy, swept into the room. He sat down on the piano stool and faced Vale, trying to smile unconcernedly.

"Well," said Vale, "What do you think of my latest?"

"I'm staggered. We're all staggered. All I can say is that if I had known in time, Ramsey should have married you only over my dead body. You could not have known what you were doing."

"I did know, though. It's all right. I'm not kicking. I'm just trying to get used to the idea of having a squaw for a wife."

"But why, in God's name, did you bring her into your house in the first place?"

"Have you heard nothing?"

"They say the old woman had beaten her."

"So she did. Horribly."

"That's nothing. A put-up job. You're too easy. Then after you brought her here there was that charivari."

"Yes. Then Chard and the minister came."

"You didn't mind them, surely?"

"No, but I did mind Ramsey. I don't mean that I was afraid of him, but—well, I was tired, and couldn't think for the heat, and there was the kid. And everyone saying, I should make it right."

"Did Ramsey say I even hinted such a thing?"

"No, but—"

"Oh, he said Gay did, eh?"

"He said she hoped I'd do the right thing."

"Meaning she hoped you'd put your head in a noose. Why didn't you come to see us and find out what we thought for yourself?"

"I was going to. I started out but—"

"Well?"

"Oh, Lord, I don't want to talk about it."

"Why didn't you come, Vale?"

"I met your daughter on the road. She was driving—and she—"

"Didn't speak?"

"No. Turned her head away. So I came home."

"Oh, you young fool! What if the girl didn't speak? She was upset. She told me about it. After she had driven down the road a bit she made the man turn back. She thought she would overtake you, but you had disappeared. And, after all, man, what if she didn't speak? You would scarcely expect her to—after what happened. But I am different. Why in God's name didn't you come to me?"

Derek shook himself impatiently. "I don't know," he said. Then he looked into Mr. Jerrold's face pleadingly. "Don't talk about it any more. I'm stupid as an owl to-

day. My brain won't work. . . . I've done it, and there's nothing more to be said. I'm going to stand by it. Will you have a drink?"

"No, it's too hot. I'll never forgive Ramsey for this. I'll make him sorry, too. I was going to buy a new carpet for the church, and I'm dashed if I will, now." He stared angrily out of the window. He added in a moment, "Just look at those clouds, Vale, over the lake. Menacing, aren't they? I must be getting home."

"Better stay till it's over."

"No, I'll have to go. Grace is very nervous about storms and this is going to be a bad one." He got up and leant on his stick. "But remember, I'm your friend, always. And if I can do anything—look here! Why can't you pay her off and get rid of her?"

"I'm not going to do anything," shouted Derek, suddenly, "but sit here and soak. It's all I'm good for. Talk, talk, talk—I'm utterly sick of talk." He glared at his friend with rather pathetic hostility.

A heavy sound of thunder rolled above the lake.

"I suppose you are," concurred Mr. Jerrold. "Well, good-bye. And, I say that note is just about due. I can meet it all right."

"I'd forgotten it."

"Well, I hadn't."

"How are things going?"

"Pretty rotten, just now. But they'll be looking up soon. They're bound to. I have grand young stock coming on. I want you to see them. Will you come over?"

"Of course I shall. And, look here, if I've acted like a grouchy brute today, don't imagine that I'm not appreciating your coming over here like this—when you're suffering."

"Good God, I'd have come on my hands and knees to have prevented this!"

"Oh, it may not turn out so badly. The thing is just to get shaken down to the new conditions. And—tell Miss Grace, will you? not to worry over that little encounter of ours. I understand. It was the only thing she could do."

A flash of lightning quivered over the darkened fields, flooding them with sombre gold. A violent crash of thunder at the same moment terrified Mr. Jerrold's horse into a rampant position, so that against the deep purple of the lake it looked like some impressive beast of heraldry.

Mr. Jerrold snatched his hat, and, growling with pain, hurried out.

2.

After the long drought, after the inertia of weeks of tropic heat, the storm rushed up from the lake as a deliverer to loose the chafing, burning bonds. Land and sky, in a torrent of rain, seemed to clasp each other like long separated lovers. Now there was such blackness that a face across the room could not be seen; now a vivid pinkish light disclosed the very cracks in the old paintings. The tops of the great trees were agitated into wild disorder, yet their rough trunks expressed invincible resistance. Nevertheless before long, with a shivering jar, one of them fell across the driveway.

The rain beat it down, as it lay prostrate, its foliage drooping on the sand, its branches, where only this morning Derek had watched a family of young squirrels wantonly frisking, now crumpled against the ground. Why had it been selected for disaster? Had it invited the turbulent embrace of the wind? He was sorry to see it fallen, and, from pitying it, he came to pitying himself. It seemed to him that in some mysterious way he had been made the plaything of a cruel and capricious fate. . . .

A sudden scream from the dining room made him start. "What's the matter now?" he asked irritably as he hurried

out. Fawnie was rocking her body in fear, her arms clasping her head. Phœbe sat nursing the baby. One of Fawnie's little brothers, the one who was accustomed to carry the idiot boy, stood in a dark corner, the whites of his eyes prominent with fear. "What's the matter?" repeated Derek. "Was it the tree? That's all right. There are plenty more." He went to Fawnie and took her arms from her head. She threw herself against his shoulder, sobbing, "Oh, I am so scared! I am so scared! Another of them will fall and smash the roof. Oo—I wish I was in the shack! It's this high ceiling—if it was to fall on us, from so far, it'd kill us sure."

"Nonsense," said Derek. "It's a very low ceiling. See, I can almost touch it with my hand." Still Fawnie cried.

"She's worse than the baby," said Phœbe. "He's a lamb, ain't ye, my pet? A lamb, if ever there was one. Look at his eyes dancin', Mr. Vale. Blue, ain't they? Look at his little hands. Hello, fat fingers—" she mumbled his chubby fists and dandled him.

"What is Lisgar doing here?" asked Derek of Fawnie. He did not want her family hanging about the house.

"He was gettin' a point of milk when the storm came on. I brought him in here out of the kitchen 'cause that ole Snailem, and Hugh, and some Mistwell fellers was teasin' him. I'll put him out in the storm, if you like, Durek."

"No, no. It's all right. Get him a piece of cake, Phœbe, and he'll forget to be afraid."

Phœbe, the baby tucked under her arm, went to the kitchen. She brought back a tray covered with tea cups, a pot of tea, and a plate heaped with seed-cake. A sound of scraping chairs came from the kitchen as the men drew up to the table for a like refreshment. Lisgar's bright eyes grew round and he drew near the tray, yet, when Derek

had put a piece of cake in his hand, he was still too frightened to eat, and stood, motionless as a bronze statue, his gaze intensely fixed on the streaming window, as he watched for the next terrifying flash. Rain thundered on the roof, and spattered in the fireplace. Phœbe returned to the kitchen to eat with the men. She took the baby with her, talking unintelligibly to him.

Fawnie had established herself beside the teapot. She was calm now, even playful, because the storm was easing, and she felt protected by Derek's presence. The cake and tea tasted very good to Derek, for he had eaten nothing since his breakfast the morning before. His spirits rose, and when Fawnie clapped her hands as a glimmer of sunlight gained the room, he smiled at her as at a child and said,

"Going to be a good girl?"

"You bet," she replied nodding her head emphatically. "And Phœbe's got to mind the baby and call me Mrs. Vale every time she speaks to me, and not laugh at my clothes. Kin I buy some new clothes right away, Durek?"

"Yes, but you must not be sharp with Phœbe or she'll leave, and God knows what we should do then."

"I'd get another servant, an Indian girl, and I'd slap her face if she was saucy, and pull her hair, and make her scrub the floor five times a day, hey, Lisgar, wouldn't I?"

"Sure," said Lisgar, "you'd likely kill her."

"In the meantime," Derek made his tone severe, "you're not to order Phœbe about too freely. She won't stand it, and I want to keep her."

Rising, he shook himself impatiently, strode to the door and threw it open. A moist, cool breeze swept into the room. Large bright drops still fell from the eave and splashed on the flagstones below, but the clouds, massed

into dark towers and sinister battlements, were receding southward. Overhead the sky was a drenched and tender blue.

"Oh, see the rainbow!" cried Fawnie, "like a fonny bridge across the lake."

"A good omen, Fawnie."

"World without end. Omen," she repeated, remembering the marriage service.

"I thought you said you didn't understand a word the clergyman said," laughed Derek.

"Don' you believe everything I say. I say what comes into my head. Let's go out."

It was delicious out of doors. The dripping grass was sweet and cool to tread on; delicate clouds of pink and gold floated like banners of peace above the tree tops. They went to the fallen tree and examined it. Lisgar began to walk the length of its splendid tapering trunk. A brood of half-grown chickens had taken shelter beneath its leaves. They ran out now, shaking themselves and stretching their long legs joyously. Yet, last of all came one who moved stiffly, half-dead from wet and chill. He had never feathered as he should; in fact, he had no feathers except on his head and wings, and a little ridiculous down on his red, sunburnt body. Now he staggered forth, grotesque, yet pitiable. Derek picked him up. "He's positively indecent," he said. "I suppose I ought to wring his neck. He'll never be any good."

"Give him to Lisgar. The ole woman'll put him in the pot."

That settled it. Derek carried him to the kitchen and made Phœbe wrap him in warm flannel, and give him a little milk. Soon he looked out brightly enough from his wrapper and opened his beak for more milk.

"Snailem found three poults behind the apple-house, flat-

tened right out by the rain, dead as door nails," said Phœbe.

"Better dead," muttered Snailem, shifting his tobacco, "better dead than livin' to be et."

3.

Derek had felt that he must get away from the house with its strange associations—the atmosphere of his marriage clung like stale incense to the rooms. After a few turns on the driveway, he had followed the path into the orchard.

It was dark as a crow's wing there, a good place to wander unseen. The lantern hanging before the shack only served to intensify the richness of the night, as a jewel the raven hair of a woman.

He lighted his pipe, and paced up and down under the wet trees, enjoying the coolness of the night and the movement of his body after the long hours in the parlour. He could hear voices near the lantern, and, as he approached the shack he saw the figures of several men about the table under the lantern. Then he heard the rattle of dice and a low laugh from Jammery. The other men never laughed audibly. Concealed by the trees, he drew nearer and saw their faces clearly as they bent over the table. Isaac and Enoch, the sons-in-law; Charley, the grown-up son; and handsome Jammery, his even features and slender moustache in contrast with the rough-hewn, bony faces of Isaac and John, and the round boyish face of Charley. Inside the shack he could see a group of women and boys. The old woman was plucking a fowl which was tied to the ceiling by its feet.

Jammery was winning, for he drew a little pile of coins to him, and looked in at the door with another laugh. Perhaps he had promised one of the girls a present if he won, for one quickly darted out and put her arms about his neck

and kissed him. Derek's pipe had gone out and he refilled it, cautiously striking a match and shielding it under his coat. But he had in mind the senses of the white man, not the brown. In an instant the face of every Indian was turned towards him; Jammery got up and came over.

"It's you, is it, Mr. Vale?" he said. "I saw the light on your face, and recognized you. It's nice in the orchard, isn't it, since the rain?"

"Yes. I was just taking a stroll."

"I hope you won't mind us having a little game. Just a few dollars pass between us of an evening."

"I don't mind. I'll come over and watch you for a bit."

Jammery's eyebrows went up, but he answered politely: "Yes, do. We'd be pleased to have you, and I can offer you a glass of whiskey that's not too bad if you would not be above drinking with Indians."

Derek gave a reckless laugh. "Above drinking with Indians! Why should I be? You're my brothers-in-law now, aren't you. All one family!"

"Yes, I suppose that's so."

Derek caught him by the arm. "Come along, then, brother-in-law, let's have a drink together. I've been drinking for two days, but that doesn't matter."

"I guess you're the sort that can stand a lot," said Jammery, admiringly. "Half a dozen drinks would make those fellows wild, and even I couldn't stand what you can."

"I'm as sober as a judge," said Derek, truculently.

"Anyone can see that. I'm glad I have something respectable to offer you."

The men at the table showed no surprise at Derek's advent, but the old squaw, after a sharp look into Jammery's face, slammed the door of the shack. Enoch, a quiet, slow Indian, rose and offered his place on the bench to Derek.

"Thanks," said Derek, taking it. "Go on with your game. I'll watch."

Jammery produced a bottle from under the table, and going to the cupboard in the lean-to, returned with a tumbler which Derek recognized as one from his own house. "It's the only glass we have," explained Jammery, "we like it just as well out of tin mugs."

Derek took the glass that Jammery handed him and sipped it critically. The flavour was so like his own that the thought crossed his mind that probably Fawnie had had something to do with the presence of this good Scotch in the shack. Nevertheless, he took his drink philosophically. He liked to watch the Indians as they played, their deep-set eyes glittering like jewels in their immobile swarthy faces, the movements of their hands as they shook the dice. Jammery continued to win. Presently young Charley began to pay his debts in packets of red picker's tickets with the name of Derek's uncle printed on them. At last they were gone, and the boy rose sulkily from the table, saying a few words in Indian to Jammery.

"Very well," replied Jammery, in English, "go to bed. Perhaps Mr. Vale would like to take your place."

"I shouldn't mind," said Derek. As a matter of fact, he had been wanting to take a hand for some time. . . .

So Grimstone folded him closer in its woods, and orchards, and streams, and in the lives of the aboriginal people who had once so barbarously dwelt there.

The women went to their bunks; and a slight silver moon rose above the orchard. An owl cried repeatedly in a mournful, downward trill. The men at the table noticed none of these things. Derek had had a considerable amount of money in his pockets and he was losing it slowly but surely to Jammery and Isaac. He did not mind, for

Jammery kept his glass full and it was the excitement of the play he craved. He played wildly, his cheeks flushed by drink, and his fair face contrasting strangely with the bronze countenances about him.

Snailem had cleaned out the apple-house that day, and thrown a few bushels of withered apples from last year's crop into a corner of the orchard for the pigs. They had been up finishing these by moonlight and now, attracted by the light of the lantern, they came running and stamping through the trees to the very feet of the gamblers. They crowded closely around them, snuffling and snorting, their coarse pink snouts wet with apple juice turned up towards the men's faces. A big Yorkshire sow peered quizzically up at Derek, chewing something with relish, in short quick smacks. He stared at her in surprise.

"Damned if I ever saw such intelligent fache, as fache on thish sow," he said. "Look at her, Jammery."

Enoch and Isaac began to drive the pigs away with kicks, and blows with a stick.

"I liked thish—I'll come again," said Derek, as he got up to go.

"I'll walk through the orchard with you," Jammery said, gently taking his arm.

"No; don't wannany help. Leggo my arm."

He shook himself free and marched steadily down the orchard path, the pigs darting here and there, out of his way. He was in good spirits, and broke into a song that he and two Halifax friends had often sung as a trio:

"A little farm well tilled,
A little barn well filled,
A little wife well willed—
Give me, give me."

His good baritone voice, rich with emotion, echoed against the grey walls of Grimstone. . . . He was looking

up at Fawnie's window, when, in a tone deepened by melancholy, he sang the last verse:

"I like the farm well tilled,
And I like the house well filled,
But no wife at all—
Give me, give me."

The locust flowers fell about him; the lake lapped musically upon the shingle; a cockerel crowed feebly in the barn. Derek laid his head against the gray wall, and wept.

CHAPTER V

Edmund

1.

Mr. Jerrold and Hobbs were leaning against a gate watching a stableman breaking in a colt in the paddock before them. Mr. Jerrold watched with an almost tender smile, the awkward, yet delicate movements of the beautiful young creature, so wistfully bewildered, so unconscious of its great strength. The hard, light eyes of Hobbs seemed only to appraise its fine points as that of something to be bought, sold, or put to tests of endurance or speed.

"Don't overdo it," called Mr. Jerrold. "That's enough for today."

Hobbs showed disapproval. "You stop the training," he said, "just as she's getting into the swing of it."

"I understand breaking in colts, I think. I don't want her worried."

"Oh, well, it's for you to say."

"Yes, it's for me to say—yet."

They stood in silence as the stableman led away the colt, then Hobbs said, cheerfully,

"Things are going from bad to worse at Grimstone, they say."

Mr. Jerrold turned to him anxiously. "In what way, Hobbs? I have scarcely seen anything of Vale since his marriage—seven or eight weeks ago, isn't it? He seems to want to be let alone."

"The trouble with him," said Hobbs, "is that he was too damned cock-a-hoop in the first place. He was so proud

of owning the place, and so sure he could manage his farm, and his stock, and his Indians. He'd take no advice from anyone."

"I didn't notice that. What is the trouble now?"

"Well, Chard tells me that he has been going up to the shack almost every night gambling with his Indian brothers-in-law and Jammery, and getting so full he could hardly navigate his way home. The house has been overrun by the Indian kids, and the servant girl couldn't keep anything to eat in her cupboards. The fruit gets picked sometimes, and sometimes it don't."

"I'm sorry to hear this. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Well, I knew Mr. Vale was a friend, and I thought maybe you wouldn't want to hear anything against him. Then, I'd seen you and him talking together several times, so I supposed you'd get a notion of what was going on."

"I knew things were rather bad, but I had no idea they were in that state."

"That isn't all. A couple of days ago he flew into a rage at the way they were imposing on him—I don't blame them—I think it served him right—and he simply drove them all off the place. Followed 'em to the gate and locked it after them. Chard was passing and says he looked wild, and white as a sheet. Now the thimbleberries are dropping off the canes, and there's nobody to pick them."

Grace Jerrold then rode up on her favourite horse, whose rounded sides shone with the brightness of a polished nut. She looked paler and more slender than formerly. Hobbs gazed at her keenly, trying to fathom the origin of her pallor which, he thought, was produced by one of three causes: either the extreme heat of the early summer; the anxiety arising from her father's serious financial position; or disappointment at Vale's marriage. He was inclined to credit the last reason, although she gave him a look of cold

suspicion as she drew in her rein that he felt showed bitter resentment of his growing authority and liberty of action on the farm.

"Good morning, Miss Jerrold," he said, touching his hat, "and how is Darby this morning?"

"Very skittish," she replied. "I think he is getting more oats than is good for him."

"Ah! but you like him spirited, don't you? Think of the way he took you over that gate yesterday."

"That was his duty. It is not his duty to shy when passing the same gate this morning as though he had never seen it before."

Hobbs laughed and moved away, leaving the father and daughter together.

2.

He lifted her from her horse and they walked along the grassy lane together, he holding the rein loosely while Darby bent to crop the short new grass that had appeared since recent rain.

He said: "Do you know, Grace, Hobbs tells me that things are in a very bad state at Grimstone. Had you heard anything?"

"Yes." Her tone was reserved.

"From whom?"

"A house-maid. She would gossip as she was doing my room and—I couldn't help listening."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, I couldn't bear to talk about it. You couldn't do anything, and you had worries enough of your own."

"Are we going to let Derek ruin himself and not put out a hand?"

"I have written to his brother."

"Written to his brother! He'll not thank you for that."

"I don't desire his thanks."

"Had his brother heard of the marriage?"

"Not a word. Derek had written to him only once, a strange sort of letter he said. He couldn't understand it. He's terribly upset. He has got leave and is coming to see. He should arrive to-day."

"Grace! And you were keeping all this from your father?"

"You keep things from me."

"What sort of things?"

"Things about Hobbs—and debts—and mistakes—and failures—only lately, too."

"My darling." He put his arm about her waist. "Only because I hate to see you worried."

She smiled up at him brightly. "Don't let's worry. Everything will come right. . . . With us, I mean."

They walked in silence for a space. The mellow light of the morning made known the imminence of autumn. Goldenrod rose, taller than the fences, its sprays imprisoning passing thistledown. The hips of the brier shone, plump and ruddy. Perhaps something of the gentle melancholy of the morning overtook those two people, usually so talkative when together, or perhaps each felt less certain of the other's state of mind than ever before.

When they came to the boundary between Durras and Grimstone they saw, crossing a field, the figures of two men. They were Derek and Edmund Vale.

"Shall we go on, or wait and speak to them?" asked Grace.

"We'll wait, don't you think so? They have seen us."

The two men hesitated, spoke together excitedly a moment, then Derek turned back and Edmund came on alone.

"I'm glad to see you back," said Mr. Jerrold when the greetings were over. "I suppose your brother is glad to have you."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the young man. "He was awfully surprised. I've had jollier home-comings." He looked searchingly at Grace, but she avoided his eyes, and, pulling a hip of the brier near her, had her finger pierced by a thorn.

"Silly girl," said her father, taking out a large, tobacco-smelling handkerchief and enfolding in it the bleeding finger.

"Miss Grace believes in grasping the thorn," said Edmund. "As for me, I dread everything unpleasant. Hips and haws may flourish unhurt for all of me, as long as they've thorns to protect 'em."

"Have you met your brother's wife?" asked Mr. Jerrold.

"Just for a moment. My God, isn't this an awful marriage? I was stunned when I heard of it. Just think, he never mentioned it when he wrote! But I knew there was something wrong—I thought of something quite different." He looked hard at Grace, and she met his eyes with a troubled smile.

"Come over, Captain Vale," said Mr. Jerrold, "and talk to my daughter. Tell her some enlivening doings of Halifax. She needs cheering up. I'll take Darby home." He felt that Edmund wanted to see Grace alone.

3.

"Why do you need cheering?" His tone was almost accusing, though with an assumed lightness.

"Life cannot be always smooth for anyone, can it?"

"It should be for you."

"I expect my share of trouble like others but, really—it is over others that I worry."

"You make me very envious."

"Why?"

"Well, I don't believe you'd worry much if I were to marry an Indian."

She flushed red. "Oh, I didn't mean that. I am worrying about my father. You see, he put everything he had into this place and now he's obliged to sell it just to meet his obligations. I am afraid there won't be much left."

Edmund coloured also. "I had no idea of such a thing. I thought of your father as absolutely secure—established here permanently. He gives one that feeling."

"I know. I really believe that if he were walking in the gutter carrying a sandwich-board, he would wear that look of well-being, and people would say—'What a dashing fellow!'"

"But I am awfully sorry. Can nothing be done?"

"Oh, no. It's all over. We are to have a sale on the twelfth of September. Shall you be here till then?"

"Yes. I have a decent leave this time. But, I say, does this mean that you must move away from here?"

"Thank heaven, no. We are going to keep a cottage—that one right on the shore—it has been used by Carss, one of the gardeners. It has a pretty garden, a few fruit trees, and the tiniest stable. Then, of course, we shall keep our dogs. Our good old cook is going with us, and we are to have one cow. Perhaps I shall have to milk. Can't you see me as a strapping milkmaid?" She spoke quickly, and with an air of suppressed excitement.

Edmund's mobile face was full of sympathy. "Strange," he murmured. "Derek did not say a word about this to me."

"Oh, I suppose not. He has his own affairs to contemplate." There was bitterness in her voice.

"Well, I must say they are in a sorry mess. How a fastidious chap like he is can ever hit it off with that girl—"

Grace sharply pressed the finger that had been torn by the brier. "It hurts," she explained.

"Too bad. Take the handkerchief off and let me see it. Maybe a bit of thorn is sticking in it."

"I believe it is. But I sha'nt undo it now. When I go home—" she nursed it in her other hand. "Didn't he speak of me at all?"

"He said he met you once—on the road."

She flashed a look of challenge at him. "Now do you blame me?"

"Not a bit. All I wonder is that you speak to me. You might be excused for washing your hands of the whole family."

"As though I could do such a thing! I'm not even angry at him now. I should like to be friends if it were possible."

Edmund thought a moment then he said: "I can't seem to get near Derek. He doesn't want to talk of his affairs at all. He just says he's done it and he wants to be let alone."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I am afraid you have come among very unhappy people for your holiday, Captain Vale."

"Don't pity me for that," he said, with a tremor in his voice. "Wherever you are, there is happiness for me."

CHAPTER VI

Sweet Apples on a Rustic Seat

1.

THE next morning Fawnie came to breakfast wearing a flowered organdie dress that she had bought at Brancepeth a fortnight before. It had become soiled, and much crushed in the lap from holding the baby. The fasteners that held the neck had come off, and she had secured it with a large safety pin. These were the defects that caught Edmund's eye; he scarcely noticed the beautiful red and brown of her cheeks, or the exquisitely clear markings of her eyelids and lashes.

But Derek did not seem to mind, nor did he show annoyance when she dipped the spoon with which she had been eating thimble-berries into the sugar basin and gave it to the child to suck. Fawnie was inclined to show her authority over Phœbe. In a soft, liquid voice she ordered one thing after another from the kitchen, and, when Phœbe angrily set a plate of toast on the table, at the very end of the meal, she said softly.

"Don't you make so much noise, Phœbe. You act like you'd never had no training." And turning to Edmund, she added, "I been trainin' that girl steady for two months."

Edmund raised his eyebrows. "She seems a good sort," he said, "and good servants are hard to get."

"No, they're not," Fawnie replied, getting more sugar for the baby. "I know where I kin get a good girl any day, and not saucy neither. But I won't have an Indian. They're too lazy. Wasn't I glad when Durek sent all them

Indians flyin' off our place! He was so mad I thought he was goin' to get his gun an' shoot them. I wish he had."

"What about your fruit?" asked Edmund, turning to Derek. "How shall you get it picked?"

"I'm just going to let the thimbleberries go," said Derek, passively. "The apples and pears can be sold to a dealer outright, who will bring his own men to pick them."

"What a pity to lose your berries, though. They look a tremendous crop, too."

"They are. The ground is black with them, and the canes bending beneath the weight, but it can't be helped."

"We'd sooner waste them than keep those Sharroes an' Jammery about," put in Fawnie.

Edmund got up from the table with relief. The baby was beginning to hiccough and drool. Fawnie carried him outdoors and laid him on a pillow on the grass. Jock, the collie, came at once and lay down beside him. Edmund stared for a moment at the child's downy fair head, then with a sigh, he turned on his heel and went into the parlour. He sat down before the piano and began to play the waltz from "The Merry Widow" with languid, appealing stress.

Fawnie followed him, and stood against his back, gazing with fascination at the movements of his hands, her body gently swaying with the rhythm. "Oh, I like that piece," she breathed. "Is it a hymn? It don' sound jus' like a hymn, and yet it's too slow for a jig. Say, Ted" (she had, at once, acquired the familiar nickname), "when you play like that it makes me feel like as if my blood was dancin' in my body."

He looked up at her curiously. "Your blood dancing, eh, Fawnie? Fast and wild? or slow and sweet?"

"Slow, an' heavy, an' sweet, like the music. Tum-te, tum-tum; tum-te, tum-tum, like that. Ain't it comical?"

"Very. Altogether I think you're a comical girl, Fawnie. I begin to understand."

"Understan' what? I know. Why Durek loves me." Her arms stole about his neck and her head drooped toward his. He felt the supple fingers interlaced beneath his chin. It seemed that he could not free himself—for a moment at least—but must softly thump out the languid waltz, his eyes half-shut, his head against her breast. Then, before he made the attempt, her cheek was pressed to his, and her lips had touched him, somewhere near the mouth.

He turned his head in her arms and looked towards the door. Derek had come in.

"Oh, Lord," cried Edmund, freeing himself. "This is only a joke, Derek."

Derek caught Fawnie by the arm and jerked her savagely away from his brother. "Never do that again," he said.

She hunched her shoulders like a child, half-laughing, half-crying.

"She didn't mean anything," said Edmund, his face scarlet. "She was just thanking me for the music."

"I'll thank you for any music you make," replied Derek, also flushed. "Come along, let us go out."

They passed Fawnie without looking at her, and went out of doors.

The air was still; the sunlight dim and ruddy with the haze of distant forest fires. Tiny yellow leaves fluttered from the locust trees and lay like little gold coins upon the grass. The baby blinked up at the two young men, narrowing his eyes, and stretching his lips in a smile.

"Why, he's laughing," said Edmund. "I didn't know they laughed at that age. What's the joke?"

"He sees me. He thinks I'm funny for some reason. When he flaps his hands that way he wants to be taken up." Derek picked him up and looked over his downy head at

Edmund with a mixture of fatherly pride and sheepishness. "Just look at those legs."

The brothers bent over the fat, kicking limbs of the youngster, trying to forget the encounter of a few minutes ago, yet both feeling some constraint.

Fawnie's brown fingers appeared between the slats of the shutters on the window next them. "Please hand me in my baby," she said in a very small voice. "I got to nurse him."

"Open the shutter, then," replied Derek. "I can't put him between the slats."

"I am afraid to open the shutters."

"Why?"

"Because you will hit me."

"Nonsense. If you want the baby, open them."

Cautiously she unlatched a shutter, pushed it a little way open, and put her hands through the opening. Derek laid the baby in them. She drew the child quickly to her and closed the shutters, but they had a glimpse of her smile and her sliding velvet eyes.

"She's just a child," said Derek to Edmund.

"I think she's awfully sly," said Edmund in a tone of profound concern.

2.

They walked through the cherry orchard where black currant bushes set among the trees brushed against them as they passed, yielding their peculiar teasing scent. They crossed a field of stubble, where the turkey hens were grazing and the gobbler circling about them with his wattles flaming as though it were spring, and entered the apple orchard.

"It appears to be a splendid crop," remarked Edmund, looking up at the red and green and yellow fruit hanging so abundantly among the leaves.

"It is," replied Derek, "and I shall need the money to make up for the loss of my thimbleberries."

"It's a lovely place," Edmund said, dropping to the grass in a sunny space. "What a view! From here those white sheep on the bluff against the blue of the lake—and that glimpse of the herd down by the creek—I'm just going to light my pipe and enjoy the whole thing. You can scarcely imagine a more perfect spot for one's first smoke in the morning—a serene view, pure air, the sound of those turkey hens gurgling to each other, now and then an apple falling. . . . Do you know, Derek, at this moment, I feel almost reconciled to this astounding marriage of yours."

"Don't let the reconciliation be too complete," returned Derek, smiling down at him with meaning.

Edmund closed his eyes and emitted a cloud of smoke that hung like a grey-blue scarf on the quiet air. An apple fell from the tree above him. Derek picked it up and saw that it was one of the sweet apples that Grace Jerrold had said she liked best, the day of Solomon Sharroe's funeral. He walked around the tree selecting the finest, which he dropped into his cap.

"Why don't you sit down and smoke?" asked his brother. "What are you doing?"

"I must go back to where Hugh is ploughing. I want to speak to him. I shan't be long."

He had made up his mind to take the apples to a rustic seat that had been built on the fringe of the Durras woods for Grace. He knew she spent a part of every fine day there, and no one would touch the apples if they were on her seat. His walk became eager with the pleasure of doing something for her. He wondered what he should do if she were already there and they met face to face.

But she was not there. He arranged the apples in a

compact group on the seat, and, after looking at them meditatively a moment went to interview Hugh.

When he returned to the orchard Edmund was half asleep, but he roused himself and asked, "Everything all right?"

"Oh, yes!" said Derek, sitting down beside him. "Hugh is getting on well. He is a good man. The only good man I have now. Snailem is a fool. Old Peek and the boys from Mistwell are makeshifts. Next spring I must try to get plenty of competent help. It means success, and the lack of it failure."

Edmund turned to him suddenly. "Have you heard that Mr. Jerrold is in difficulties? That he is having a sale on the twelfth?"

"He has a sale of surplus stock twice a year."

"This is a sale of *everything*—stock, implements, house, furniture, the whole farm. Had you heard nothing?"

Derek looked at him aghast. "I hadn't heard a word about it. Who told you?"

"Grace, yesterday. She's fearfully cut up, naturally. But plucky, you know."

Derek sat in silence a moment, then he asked, "Are they going to move?"

"No; they are keeping a gardener's cottage, and they will have a cow, and a horse, and their dogs, of course. But what a change!"

"I have been swallowed up by my own little tempest lately, and so I've known nothing of the storm and stress my neighbours are passing through. I am very sorry. I like him tremendously—and she"—he turned suddenly to Edmund—"How is it between you two?" he asked. "May I know?"

"Oh, nothing is settled. But it must be soon. While

I'm very sorry about this disaster of theirs, it has given me courage to rush matters a bit."

Derek nodded. His mind was wandering, as it had a habit of doing lately. He was thinking of those sweet apples on the rustic seat, and wondering whether she had found them yet, whether she could care for a little thing like that in troubled days like these. She seemed far away from him, yet always on the fringe of his thoughts. She was like a loved person of whom one dreams, yet whose face one cannot clearly see.

3.

Edmund, strolling through the woods of Durras, hoping to meet Grace, came across the rustic seat, and sat down. He wondered how those seven smooth, yellow apples came there. They looked as though they were waiting for someone. He decided to wait with them.

Birds, free from family cares, sang all about him, making a happy, careless jargon of song that was delightful. A black squirrel, with an enormous brush, clung head downward on a tree nearby and rated him fluently for his intrusion. He picked up one of the apples and began to eat it.

He was in a mood of happy confidence, and when he saw Grace approaching he felt that good fortune was with him that day indeed. He tossed the remainder of the apple under the seat and sprang forward to meet her.

"I am a lucky fellow," he said. "I've been wanting so much to meet you this morning, and here you are, and here are birds to greet you, and a secluded seat, and apples—golden apples—by the Rood!"

He was excited, and he did not try to conceal his excitement. That was not his way. Rather he encouraged himself in his emotions as though he were a spectator who

said, "Go it old fellow!" He kept her hand and led her to the seat.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "How nice of you to bring me those sweet apples! No other tree produces quite the same flavour."

"I did not know that that particular tree had any special virtue," said Edmund, wondering where the devil the apples had come from, "but I'm glad they are your favourites. Won't you have one now?"

"Thank you. It is rather soon after breakfast. I shall put them carefully in my work-bag and carry them home, and devour them all greedily in my own room."

She opened a flowered chintz bag and dropped the apples one by one into it. The movements of her gentle, yet firm, hands thrilled the young man even more than the sweetness of her lowered face.

"I wish," he said, "that I could give you a pleasure more lasting."

She raised her eyes to his face. "Oh, it is a lasting pleasure to have you so thoughtful for me—so kind—in every way."

"But I don't want to be thoughtful," he broke out. "I don't want to be kind. I want to love you—to make you love me. I can't offer myself as an ideal husband. I'm self-willed—I'm thoughtless—but I love you. I haven't looked at another woman since I met you last Christmas."

"Please wait—" she interrupted—"let me speak."

"No. Not till you've heard me out. Oh, don't refuse me, Grace. I may not have it in me to make you placidly happy, but who wants to be placid! I think we could have a joyous, exciting life together. Old Halifax isn't bad. And you'd have the sea to make up for this lake you love."

She clutched the flowered bag and returned his brilliant dark gaze with a look of almost motherly solicitude.

"Poor boy—to care for me like that. Because I can't—"

"Now don't say you can't! Think it over." He had caught her hand and held it.

"No. Thinking would not change me. I don't care for you in that way."

"You love someone else!"

"I don't think I want to marry anyone. I expect I love my father too much."

"But that's not fair. He has had a woman's best love already. I—" his voice broke—"have no one to love me."

"Oh, but you will," she comforted, "for you are really very lovable."

"Then why don't you love me?"

"I do. But not in that way."

"Do you love Derek?"

She rose, and looked down at him angrily. "You know you have no right to ask that."

"You do love him then!"

"I love you both—as friends."

"If I thought"—his eyes flamed accusingly into hers—"if I thought you loved Derek, I'd throw myself into the lake."

"Ah, now you make me glad I do not love you—too well."

"Why?"

"Because you are acting in such a pettish, childish way."

"Pettish—childish—" he repeated, with a short, infuriated laugh. "Go on! I can bear it."

"You must see for yourself that we're not suited to each other. Why, we are quarrelling already."

"Only because you are so cruel."

"And you are so unreasonable. . . ."

Sgaith had followed her, and now began furiously to dig a hole between them, as they stood facing each other. Im-

partially she threw earth over the feet of both, as she circled, with her wicked forepaws as a pivot.

"Sgaith thinks we're very silly," said Grace. "She's digging a hole to crawl into for very shame."

"She's digging a grave for my hopes," said Edmund:

And so they parted, Grace with her little bag of apples, Edmund with a heavy heart, and Sgaith with earth on her nose.

4.

Edmund found Derek.

"Well, that's over," he said. "I asked her and—she won't have me."

Derek was combing the wild, thick mane of a Welsh pony. He parted it carefully before he replied, "I'm awfully sorry for you, old man."

"I'm sorry for myself." He sat down on a stool just outside the stall. The pony, peering round at him through her fringe of hair, lifted her small hind foot tentatively.

"That's right," said Edmund, shifting his stool a little. "Kick me when I'm down."

"Oh, she's just playful," said Derek.

"Yes, the female of the species is a playful lot." He spoke with grim jocularity. "Everything is play to her. They're all alike. Even the little brute Sgaith. She dug a hole and threw dirt on me just after I'd been rejected."

Derek burst into sudden laughter; then he asked seriously. "Do you think it's final?"

"I think she meant it. But I'm going to get after her again before I leave."

There was silence for a time except for the swish of the curry-comb and Derek's soft whistle. Then he asked, as though for something to say, "Where were you?"

"On that rustic seat."

"Oh . . . stand still, girl. . . . Were there. . . ."

"Were there what?"

"Any apples—on the seat?"

"Yes, yellow sweet ones. Did you put them there?" Suspicion leaped into his eyes.

"Yes, I knew she liked that kind."

"She thought I had brought them."

"That's all right."

Silence once more. Then Edmund,

"You don't suppose it's Ramsey, do you, Derek?"

Derek turned and faced him, comb in hand.

"Ramsey! What put him in your head?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . . The way he hustled you into that marriage, now. . . . I've thought of that. . . . Just as though he wanted to make sure you were out of the way."

"I wouldn't believe that of Ramsey. He's absolutely straight. No, Grace doesn't love anyone but her father. . . . Whoa, pet. Now, you're as sleek as a chestnut."

CHAPTER VII

Sale at Durras—Darby

1.

"I WANT to go to Brancepeth," announced Fawnie, "to buy some clothes. I ain't got a decent thing to wear, and Baby, he's just burstin' out of his little white dress, and his pink one is all iron rust, and his feet are bare, and he's got to have a baby carriage. I can't go around carryin' him on my back like I was a common squaw. I want to get him a wicker carriage with a silk parasol, and a lace cover with a pink bow, and pink kid slippers, and an embroidered dress. . . . How much money are you goin' to give me, Durek?"

"You evidently take me for a millionaire," said Derek. "Do you realize that I haven't got a cent from my thimbleberries; that I've just paid the help their wages, and the vet. his bill; that my taxes are due, and I've just lost a good milch cow?"

Fawnie laughed gaily. "Oh, you are stingy! You know you have heaps of money in the bank. Get me some of that. If you won't I will go and work for Mrs. Chard and earn some. And I'll tell Mr. Chard you beat me."

They were sitting on the shore watching the red harvest moon rise from the blackness of the lake. Fawnie held the baby on her lap. She had wrapped a shawl about him so that his downy head, still soft and unhardened in bone or cartilage projected. Derek, stretched on the sand, lazily watched the pair. Edmund, sitting on the breakwater at a little distance, smoked and dangled his legs in silence. His

leave was almost up. He had to return to Halifax with no hope of winning Grace, but, on this warm September night, sweet with the smells of land and lake, he was pensive rather than sad.

Fawnie began to press the muscles of Derek's arm with her fingers. "You could beat me very hard," she said. "But you won't, will you, darling? (A new word she had recently acquired, along with "Jolly good," and the phrase —"as a matter of fac' ") "You won't beat me, darling. You'll jus' give me a lot of money, and let Snailem drive me to Brancepeth, eh?"

Derek capitulated. "To-morrow is Mr. Jerrold's sale. The men would like a holiday, and I expect Snailem would sooner drive to Brancepeth than go to the sale. Would twenty dollars do, Fawnie?"

She turned her eyes on him reproachfully. "My goodness, no. The baby carriage alone will cost fifteen dollars. And, you know, Durek, I never had no proper clothes when I married you. I got to buy them now. I'm the finest lady about here, now Grace Jerrold's got to move into a little old cottage. And she ain't married anyhow. Yes—I'm the finest lady between Brancepeth and Mistwell." She gazed at the golden moon, in blissful meditation. Then—"It will take fifty dollars."

"Very well," assented Derek. "You shall have it. But be careful what you buy. You sha'n't get any more money till winter, mind. And I shouldn't buy Buckskin pink kid shoes if I were you. I'd buy him nice little brown shoes and two or three pairs of socks to match. They'll suit him better."

"I'll buy him whatever looks the best. I need some scented soap, too, and a pair of pink silk shirred garters with buckles at the side."

Edmund groaned from his perch on the breakwater. "I

see the finish of that fifty dollars, Derek. You had better go with her."

"No," replied Derek, shortly. He had not appeared abroad with Fawnie yet, and he was in no hurry to do so. On the few occasions when he had gone to either of the villages alone, he had found himself an embarrassed object of interest. In the Duke of York he had seen a man nudge his neighbour and heard him whisper: "There's Mr. Vale, from down Mistwell way—him that married an Indian girl lately. They've got a tidy boy already, 'tis said, dark as a Arab, but his hair—man, they say it's as light as gold."

No . . . he would give Fawnie the fifty dollars and let her enjoy herself in her own way.

2.

She had carried the child to bed. Derek had helped her up the steep steps in the rock, and, when she had been swallowed by the darkness above, he wheeled and went down the shingle to the breakwater.

"There's something I want you to do for me, Ted," he said huskily.

"Fire away."

"You know that chestnut of Grace's?"

"Darby? Oh, yes."

"He's up for sale tomorrow. I want you to go and buy him in for me. I can't bear to think of her being without him."

"Aren't they keeping a horse at all?"

"Just the big grey that Mr. Jerrold rides. You see he can be driven in the trap as well. Darby has never been harnessed."

"How high will you go?"

"High enough to get him. But I don't believe it will be

very steep. I think they've chosen a rotten time for the sale. But it was Hobbs's doing."

"Why rotten?"

"Well, you know the election is coming the twenty-first. All the fruit growers are afraid Laurier will be returned. They know Reciprocity would ruin them. They'll want to hang on to what money they have. They'll simply be afraid to buy."

"Why does Mr. Jerrold choose such a time for his sale?"

"I don't know. Suppose Hobbs urges him. He is the largest creditor. Mr. Jerrold is between the devil and the deep sea. If he waits till after the election conditions may be worse than ever. Imagine what it will mean to us if American fruit is allowed to be sent here duty free—and their season about three weeks in advance of ours."

"It would be a damned shame," agreed Edmund.

Derek sat down beside him, and after a pause, Edmund said: "I've asked her twice since that first time, but she's stuck to her guns. Won't have me. I'll get used to it, I suppose, but it's hard."

"I repeat that she doesn't love anyone but her father."

"No—I believe she loves you. The more I think over things she's said—and ways she's looked—I can't explain —but I'm sure it's you."

The lake murmured darkly to the leaning sky; fiery ripples curled below their feet; Derek gazed at that golden orb beloved by captives, and felt the galling of his chains.

3.

Derek spent a restless morning. He could not bear to see the hurrying buggies and motor cars going to the sale. They seemed to him like birds of prey skimming eagerly to the scene of a calamity. He could scarcely believe that the

Jerrolds had left the big red house. Hugh had told him that they had moved to the cottage the afternoon before. Phœbe had seen Mr. Jerrold striding across the fields carrying a silver candelabrum in his arms. And Grace had been seen, with her one servant, hanging curtains at the windows of the cottage. "Mark my words!" Phœbe had cried. "We shall have Hobbs as our next neighbour in the great house. It makes me all of a boilin' stew to think of. The world's gone crazy, and no mistake. Hobbs weren't satisfied with being a gentleman agent—that's what he calls himself if you'll believe me—but he aims to be a gentleman as ever was. The very idear! With that burr to his tongue! They say he's raised his eyes to Miss Jerrold. I'd be glad to hear as one of his own prize cocks had pecked 'em out. If there's one thing I hate, it's folk gettin' out of their proper station. It puts me all in a boilin' stew it does."

She followed Derek up and down, and in and out, talking with heat. She made him a thimbleberry roly-poly for dinner. He wished he might have been allowed to forget the thimbleberries. He pictured himself as eating his way through the whole patch. She made him a custard to pour over the pudding. In short, she treated him as a prisoner who had been granted a few hours of freedom.

At four o'clock he heard a clatter of hoofs on the bridge, and, looking out the stable window—he was always tinkering at the harness—he saw Edmund and Hugh crossing it in the trap, the latter leading by a halter Grace's horse, Darby, who showed his disapproval of the proceeding by petulant jumpings and cavortings from side to side.

Derek went out to meet them. "I'm glad you were able to get him," he said, laying a soothing hand on the chestnut's quivering side. "Did he come high?"

"High eneuch," answered Hugh, smiling. "Captain Vale

and Mr. Hobbs had it out between them. And I'm glad Hobbs didna get him."

Edmund jumped sulkily to the ground and turned towards the house.

"Put Darby in the loose box, Hugh," directed Derek, "and try to make him easy in his mind, if you can." Then he followed his brother. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"I could take something substantial for tea. They gave us sandwiches and beer, at one o'clock. Yes, I'm rather hungry."

Derek ordered tea and they sat down in the dining room. Edmund picked up a month-old copy of *Punch* and began gloomily to read.

"What's the matter?" demanded Derek. "You seem peeved."

"Do you know where Fawnie is?"

"Snailem took her to Brancepeth to buy clothes. You knew that. What's she been up to? She should have been back long ago."

Edmund began to walk angrily up and down the room. "I'll tell you then. She ought to be thrashed. About an hour ago she and Snailem appeared at the sale. She holding the kid on her lap. Snailem looking half-full, and a pram tied on the back of the buggy. You can imagine the outfit. . . . I was thunder-struck. The crowd seemed to know who she was instantly. A lot of them thought I was you, and turned and grinned at me." He stopped before Derek and looked down at him accusingly.

"Well," said Derek, calmly. "Go on. What did she do?"

"Oh, she was as bold as brass. She alighted from her equipage. Snailem gave her his hand. Then he got the pram for her, and she set the kid in it. It was wicker, painted green, and there was a cover with a big pink bow. She'd got herself a hat with cherries on it and long green

streamers. The auctioneer had to pound his hammer on the table to make the men look at him. They all wanted to stare at her. . . ." He picked up *Punch* again and began to read as Phœbe entered with the tray.

"What next?" asked Derek, when the door had closed behind her.

"Snailem tied his nag to the fence and joined some loafers on a back bench. Fawnie paraded up and down under that row of maples. Their leaves are all turning red and the whole effect was—garish. She'd toss her head so the green streamers would flutter—the kid had a toy balloon—and every now and again she'd trot round to the front of the pram and arrange the pink bow, or take a sweet out of a paper bag at his feet."

"Where is she now? Why didn't you bring her home?"

"Bring her home! I see myself. I got out as soon as I had paid for the horse. The last I saw of her she was on her way to the house where some furniture was to be sold. She was with a crowd of well-to-do men and their wives from Brancepeth. What do you suppose made her do it?"

"Pure cussedness. Nothing else under the sun."

Phœbe brought some boiled eggs and they ate in silence for a while, each contemplating Fawnie's wickedness from his own angle. Then Derek asked,

"How did things go?"

Edmund groaned. "About as badly as possible. The implements were the worst. Implements that had cost two hundred dollars, as good as new, went for thirty or forty. Separators, incubators—just given away. The stock wasn't so bad. But bad enough. I paid one hundred and eighty for Darby. Hobbs wanted him. He's a beast that fellow. He has bought the place and enough stock and implements to run it in a modest way. But he'll branch out. He'll do better for himself than he ever did for Jerrold. . . . He

came over and spoke to me. Told me some of his plans. He was almost drunk with exhilaration but declared he was not 'cock-a-hoop' about it. Then he jerked his head towards Fawnie and said, 'Your sister-in-law is coming on like anything, isn't she, Captain Vale?' " Then Edmund swore with a fluency that showed that his years in the army had not been altogether wasted.

4.

They were sitting smoking in the porch. There had been a stream of vehicles, but the road was now resuming its accustomed quiet.

"I can't imagine what is keeping her," muttered Derek. "I'm beginning to get anxious."

"God knows," replied Edmund. "Probably hobnobbing with Hobbs. Each one assuring the other that they are not 'cock-a-hoop'."

Derek shifted in his willow chair, making it creak beneath him. He stared anxiously up the road. "There she comes, now," he exclaimed.

She was approaching along the edge of the bluffs, her figure, in its yellow dress and streamered hat, silhouetted against the burnished blue of the sky. She was wheeling the perambulator before her, and, as she descended and ascended the rolling side of the cliff, it was surprising that the child was not thrown from its seat. But they came steadily on, watched in silence by the brothers.

She descended the last steep, crossed the bridge, and began to climb the rise to the gate. Phœbe, seeing her from the kitchen window, where she was washing dishes, rushed out along the drive to meet the baby, her arms still wet with dishwater, her woolen slippers padding on the sand.

"Here comes the prince!" she cried. "See him in his fine

new chaise! Oh, the poppetty poppet! Would he come to his Phœbe, then!"

"For goodness sake, take him, Phœbe," said Fawnie. "I'm tired out. I've had such a busy day. Everybody wantin' to shake hands with me an' see the baby. Well, Durek, did you think I was los'?"

She had crossed the lawn, and stood before them with an air of mingled fear and audacity, like a naughty child. Derek, his chin grasped in his hand, stared down at her.

"How did you dare," he said, "to go to that sale and flaunt yourself before every one in those ridiculous clothes? How do you suppose Ted felt when he saw you? What kept you so late?"

"He made me pretty mad," retorted Fawnie, "not lettin' on he knew me. Folks said to me afterwards, 'You and your husban' didn't seem to see each other, did you, Mrs. Vale?' And I says: 'That feller ain't my husban'. My husban's a handsome man with curly light hair like baby's. That's jus' his poor brother who's out of a job, an' we're keepin' him for a while.' " She showed her pearl-like little teeth in a malicious grin.

"Oh, you little devil," said Derek, and burst out laughing. But Edmund kept a sulky silence. Fawnie came up the steps and perched herself on the railing.

"Now I tell you what I been doin'," she said, arranging the streamers of her hat over one shoulder. "First Snailem an' me went to Brancepeth. Snailem's an old fool. I had to go an' bring him out of the Duke of York myself, or he'd have got full. I went to the very best store an' I bought a lovely white dress for myself—an' a hat—an' shoes—an' earrings an' new clothes for Baby—all sensible like you said. An' I had ten dollars left. Then, when we was drivin' home, we passed the sale, an' Snailem says, 'What's the hurry? Let's go in!' So we went in; an' after

the pigs, an' cows, an' reapers, an' mowers was sold, the auctioneer he moved on up to the big house. Then"—she clasped her hands and nodded brightly—"then, I remembered my ten dollars. Oh, I was glad! I went with all the people, an' then I met Mr. Hobbs. I told him I wanted to buy something nice for my own room. He was awful kind. He stayed right beside me and helped me to bid. Said he wanted to be neighbourly." She cast a triumphant look at Edmund, who sat with folded arms, and face averted, the picture of disapproval.

"Good old Hobbs," said Derek, grinning. "And what did you buy?"

"Here comes Snailem with them now—a great big lookin'-glass, an' a little, little gold chair, see!"

Snailem was turning in at the gate, balancing with difficulty a tall pier glass that stood on the seat behind him. The little gilt chair was tied on behind. He gave a sheepish glance towards the group on the porch.

"I paid seven for the lookin'-glass an' three for the chair. I mus' see that he gets them safe upstairs." She stopped in the doorway. "I forgot to tell you, Durek, that Mr. Hobbs, he's bought the house an' some of the furniture. He's goin' to live in that big place all by hisself, an' great big Mr. Jerrold in a cottage, little as little. How fonny!" She flew out to give orders to Snailem and Hugh.

Derek broke into noisy laughter.

"What's amusing?" asked Ted savagely.

"Everything. It seems to me that life is just one howling joke after another."

5.

The sun had barely risen out of the lake when Derek led Darby through the stable yard. The air was sharp with a suspicion of frost, and sweet to the nostrils as a new-blown

flower. An oriole in the orchard, freed from summer cares, poured forth the swinging sweetness of his song. The matted foliage of the old strawberry beds was filmed by innumerable glistening cobwebs, and, here and there, the redness of late strawberries caught the eye.

Darby had had a bad night. Nothing that Hugh could do for him had been enough to make him forget the strangeness of his new surroundings. He had refused his supper; he had refused his drink of fresh spring water. Perhaps some odour of the Welsh ponies had clung to the pail, for he had picked it up disgustingly in his teeth and hurled it to the floor. When Hugh had made him a thick bed of clean straw, he had kicked it out into the passage and slept on the bare boards. Consequently Derek had had to give him a thorough grooming this morning.

Now he picked his way petulantly among the fallen walnuts on the drive, puzzled and irritated by this stranger on his back who pressed a firm leg on either of his sides. He leapt sideways through the gate, he tripped sideways down the slope; sideways, with stampings of his polished hoofs, he crossed the bridge. With quivering nostrils he sniffed a field of clover, aftermath of one of the grain crops, then, suddenly, he smelled and saw his own stable-yard. In spite of Derek he would have plunged through the gateway, but the figure of Hobbs barred his way.

"You're out early," said Hobbs. "I suppose you were impatient to try your new horse. Well, you are welcome to him, for he's an ugly devil if ever there was one."

"You're early yourself," replied Derek over his shoulder.

"It's a fact," said Hobbs. "I never went to bed last night. Just excited. Not that I was——"

"Good-bye!" shouted Derek, for Darby was galloping furiously up the road.

The blinds of the cottage were drawn. It was half-hidden

behind hydrangeas and climbing roses. Derek dismounted, unlatched the gate, and led Darby cautiously towards the little stable.

Scarcely had he opened the door of the stable when a loud whinny came from Mr. Jerrold's grey, inside. Darby answered joyously, and ran into the empty stall beside his friend, reaching around the partition to nose the familiar face. Derek tied, and unsaddled him, and, with his saddle over his arm stood watching them with a good deal of complaisance. He did not hear the light step on the drive, and it was only her cry of astonishment that made him turn and face Grace Jerrold, whom he had been trying to avoid.

"You!" she cried. "And Darby! What does this mean? I heard the whinnying and stamping in the stable and I was afraid something was wrong—so I came." She went quickly to Darby's head and laid her own head against it. The only sound for a moment was the soft blowing of her horse against her neck, and the crunching of a swede from the grey's stall.

Without being told she divined what he had done. She had been told that Darby had gone to Grimstone and had been glad, though fear that he had been bought for Fawnie to ride had crossed her mind. Now she did not dare to look at Vale, but with her eyes hidden against that satiny head she whispered,

"You must not do it. I cannot let you do it."

He answered gently, "It is the first thing I have done that has given me any pleasure in months."

"Well, only if you will let me pay you back some time."

"If you wish you may."

Then she raised her face and looked at him.

"Oh, to think that when we last met I did not speak to you!"

"Don't talk of that."

"I came back and tried to find you. I was crying. I had to keep my parasol before my face so the man would not see. I'm—afraid—I am going to cry now."

"Don't cry. Laugh! Be as happy as you can. See how happy Darby is. He's slobbering all over your shoulder."

"I know," she said, half-laughing, half-crying, "he's a naughty fellow." Then she held out her hand to him, and said, "Thank you," in a small, choked voice.

He took it, and they looked intently at each other, their eyes filled with longing, their lips compressed, their bodies tense. Then he dropped her hand and turned away. At the door he stopped, and said, without looking at her—"You refused Edmund."

"Yes."

"Because you loved me?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye, Grace—darling."

"Good-bye, Derek—darling."

He returned home, still carrying the saddle over his arm. He walked slowly, his eyes travelling across the September blue of the lake to the far horizon where a faery city reared its towers and battlements of rosy clouds above Niagara's spray.

CHAPTER VIII

Things That He Learned

1.

*E*dmund had gone back to Halifax.

On the whole Derek was not sorry, for he had felt Edmund's presence as a restraint, if not an actual rebuke. Fawnie's table manners had offended Edmund, also her untidy finery, and her habit of popping morsels of food into the baby's mouth at meal time which, often as not, he put out again to hang on the frill of his bib. When Edmund had met Derek coming out of Fawnie's room he had turned his face away with a frown; more than once he had commented on Derek's carelessness in dress, and his need of a respectable haircut. Now he was gone, and Derek felt that this rather ignoble affair of his marriage might jolt on unhindered to whatever end might be.

As a matter of fact he was far from unhappy. Since his meeting with Grace he enjoyed a new serenity of spirit. Sitting alone on the beach at night with his pipe, he contemplated the lovely fact that she loved him—had refused Edmund because of him—perhaps Ramsey.

He would recall the moment when he had stood in the stable watching the meeting of the two horses, the warmed saddle across his arm. He would see her on the threshold sweet as the early sunshine. He would feel again that tremor of joy that had shaken him when they had confessed their love. He had not met her since, but Mr. Jerrold had been over several times, and had told of their happy rides along the shore road. They rode west as a

rule, because it pained Grace to pass Durras, and there was always a struggle with Darby to get him by the gateway which he still regarded as his own.

Mr. Jerrold had recaptured his old cheerfulness. Things were not so bad as they might be. He and Gay were tremendously comfortable in the cottage. Their view was really finer than it had been at the big house. Gay could hardly tear herself away from her bedroom window at night —sat there watching the moonlight on the lake instead of going to her bed. She loved the cottage. She even liked the little stable. Would be out there first thing in the morning. He believed she was fonder of Darby than ever, since she had come so near to losing him.

Mr. Jerrold was colouring a meerschaum pipe, and, at different times, he lovingly displayed to Derek the satisfactory fashion in which it was adding tint upon tint. He also had given his annual party to the Mistwell band. Derek and Fawnie had watched the flare of their torches pass Grimstone as they sat in the basket chairs in the porch. And Mr. Jerrold had not failed to give the bandsmen their customary present of money.

"I must dig that twenty-five dollars up," he had said to his daughter. "I've never disappointed those poor beggars yet, and I shan't begin now. I'll do without something myself."

Derek was taking a renewed interest in the work of the farm, and he had a stout ally in Hugh McKay. No fall ploughing thereabout was done more thoroughly nor finished earlier. As the October nights grew cold, Derek would sit with him by the kitchen stove and talk fertilizers and manures by the hour. The little flock of sheep was excellent. One of the yearling rams had taken a first prize at the Brancepeth Fair. The handsome son of Gretta van Lowe had taken a second. The apples and pears had turned

out well. There had been very little scabby or stung fruit; the dealer who bought them had paid cash on the spot. Snailem drudged steadily along with his hoe, in company with old Peek and two boys from Mistwell. Derek, himself, spent long days among the raspberry and blackberry canes trimming and cultivating. Even Fawnie had come to take an interest in the poultry. She ran, laughing with joy, to Derek one day to tell him that when wandering among the dense and neglected thimbleberry canes, she had come upon one of the bronze turkey hens with ten active poults, graceful and plump as partridges, which were being reared undisturbed on the sweet dark berries. Derek had left his cultivating, and together they had crept like children among the prickly canes, to peer at the elusive little fellows, who one moment would be swinging gaily on a spray, their great eyes shining, and the next be hidden, crouching among the leaves, while the mother, her proud head poised, watched the intruders with vehement disdain.

The white turkey had not been seen for many weeks. It was feared that she had either been stolen or killed. But one mild, foggy morning Derek and Fawnie almost stepped on her as she sat on a nest she had hollowed out for herself in the shelter of a pile of brushwood behind the orchard. "By George!" said Derek, "She's at it yet! That bird has been sitting ever since last spring, and had no luck at all. She's simply wearing herself out to no purpose. What shall I do with her?"

"Be rough with her," advised Fawnie. "Grab her by the neck. Pull some of her tail feathers out. Give her a good kick an' bust up her nest."

Derek took the bird by the neck and lifted her off the nest. "Why she's nothing but skin and feathers," he said, "Poor thing! and look at that nest."

The untidy nest lay before them, broken shells mingled

with the clutch of shiny, stained eggs. Fawnie took up one egg after another and shook it. "Slop," she said, curtly.

"This has got to stop," Derek said. "Throw those pieces of broken bricks on the eggs and then an armful of brushwood, then I'll put her down."

The white hen looked down from Derek's arms at the demolition of her hopes. She made no protest, but the pale pink of her wattles took a deeper hue. She blinked. When all was destroyed Derek set her down. He did not pull out her tail feathers nor kick her, but he gave her a shake, and a push with his foot, and said: "Now, be off with you! and try to think of something besides sitting. There are other things in the world, believe me."

She stood poised for a moment on tiptoe, flapping her pale unused wings, then, with a harsh, croaking cry, she began to run from them into the fog. An eerie figure, she disappeared into its ready embrace with that one cry of frustrated instincts. The flock of sheep, suddenly emerging from nowhere it seemed, parted their ranks hurriedly to let her pass. It was her last supreme gesture. Derek never saw her again.

2.

Derek's house was not kept as it had been in Mrs. Machin's time. Fawnie had an unbelievable talent for disorder, and, as the baby spent most of his day in the kitchen, Phœbe allowed her dishes to pile up until the table and dresser were hidden beneath them. To Derek she seemed always to be sitting nursing him while he thumped on the table with a spoon or slobbered over an apple which he gnawed with his four ridiculous milk-teeth. Often noisy quarrels occurred between mistress and maid.

"Oh, for any sake let me get one thing done before you're after me about another!" Phœbe would shout, and

she would knock her mop against the legs of the furniture, and slop dirty water in all directions.

"Phœbe!" Fawnie would cry, "I'll have Mr. Vale throw you into the street if you ain't respecful."

"The street, indeed! I'd shouldn't have far to seek for a better situation than this. I've a cousin in Australier that would pay my passage out to-morrow if I crooked my finger. I'm more than a bit tired of Canader as it is. If it weren't for baby. . . ."

Sometimes they were amicable and made huge pots of jam which almost always boiled over or burned. The baby was given sticky spoons to lick.

One noonday Phœbe bounded in radiant. Vale had come in to dinner, but it was not ready.

"I've been talkin' over the fence to Bob Gunn," she announced breathlessly. "He's leaving Chard's today. Him and Mr. Chard had a row. The gulls has et all his fish and he's blamed Bob for it. I heard them mewling and whimpering at daybreak this morning. There's been a terrible to-do. Ho! ho! I'd ha' given a month's wage to see Mr. Chard's face." She danced a few roystering steps in her red woolen slippers.

"Whatever is she talking about?" Derek turned to Hugh.

Hugh was smiling broadly. "It happened like this, sir. Mr. Chaird had bought a catch of some wee fish that's no much guid from the Mistwell fishermen. They ca' them moon-eyes, I think. He'd got a waggon load to use as fertilizer on his strawberry beds. Bob put the horses away and left the waggon standin' by the beds, ready to begin spreading this morn. When daylight came a gull spied the lot and flew off to tell his friends. The whole flock came. I haird them makin' a great noise mysel' when my head was still under the blanket. Every gull grabbed a fish and then anither. Ye can picture how they'd circle and swoop.

When Chaird came hurrying from his bed there wasna so much as a scale in the waggon."

"And there was the gulls overhead laughin' to split their sides," cried Phœbe.

"And all the wee fish in their maws," added Hugh.

Derek smiled, not without malice. "I should like to have seen that," he said. "So Gunn is to leave?"

"Ay. He'd like to come back here, I believe."

"After the kicking I gave him? He's a hardy socialist."

"I dinna think your kicks made him sae sore as Chaird's continuous pricks and jibes."

"Well, I won't take him back."

"We won't," put in Fawnie, "have any help here that's saucy or lazy. Get about your work, Phœbe. I don't pay you for hangin' over the back fence, gossipin.' Get the meat out of the oven before it's black, and stew the tea."

Matters between Fawnie and Phœbe were bound to come to a head. They did so with calamitous force and abruptness.

Derek never discovered what the quarrel was about. The breaking of the spout off a teapot was mentioned, also the alienating of Buckskin's affections. He had kicked and screamed when his mother had picked him up, and had held supplicating arms out to Phœbe. Derek heard the torrent of words as he neared the house. The maid was in the kitchen, the mistress in the dining room, and they hurled abuse through the intervening pantry, with a ferocity only ended by Phœbe's going into hysterics and Fawnie's snatching up the bread-knife.

Derek took the knife from her, and, turning it about, gave her knuckles a smart rap with the handle. He then hustled her into the hallway and locked the door upon her. He realized then that she had tried to bite him, and he had a sudden desire to follow her and give her the whipping

she deserved. Instead, he listened to what was going on in the kitchen. He could hear gurgling moans, then a splash of water, splutterings, and Phœbe's voice—"She'll kill me. Oh, take me away! Take me away!"

Then Snailem's voice came—"Another spell like that and I wouldn't give a brass fardin' fur her."

"Are ye better, my dear?" from Hugh.

"Ay. But keep her offen me."

Derek listened, pale and disturbed. He would lock Fawnie up, sooner than let Hugh and Phœbe go. After a bit Hugh rapped at the door, and, at Derek's bidding, entered.

"We're off, sir," he said. "We'll bide here in this house no longer."

"Hugh," said Derek, quietly, "You don't know what you're saying. Phœbe has got you excited. She'll be herself again shortly."

"No," replied Hugh, doggedly. "We're quittin'. I saw an advairtissment in the paper yesterday for man and wife on a farm in the Saskatchewan. We'll get married and go straight out there. If it's no that job it'll be anither. I've had the West in mind for some time. This is no place for Phœbe. Mrs. Vale is always after her."

"Think it over, Hugh. You'll feel different to-morrow."

"I'll no!" shouted Hugh. "We want our wage, and we're quittin'!"

"Well, quit, and be damned to you," said Derek, shortly. "You can catch the afternoon train to York. Go on that."

Hugh stalked from the room. He and Phœbe began to gather up their belongings in the kitchen. Tin trunks were shifted about upstairs. Snailem washed, and dressed, and brought Mike harnessed to the fruit waggon to the side door. He and Hugh carried down the boxes, Phœbe following, her head bent, and an hysterical smile on her

face. She looked so different in her checked ulster and green velvet hat that she seemed a stranger. Hugh's well-knit figure was clad in a decent blue serge suit, and he wore a cloth cap, well pulled down. He smoked continuously, as though to brace himself, not even relinquishing his "fag," when Derek handed him his cheque.

"I'm sorry to part with you this way, Hugh," said Derek.

"Ay," muttered Hugh, and turned away.

He got into the waggon and sat on one of the boxes, while Phœbe settled herself with Snailem on the seat.

3.

The cows left the shore meadow where they had been pastured, and slowly descended the bank of the stream, which now trickled thinly over its chalky bed, forming little transparent pools, and nourishing shiny clumps of coarse watercress. It was past the hour for milking, and the cows lowed protestingly as they splashed across the stream. Phœbe had always been most prompt about the milking. Now Vale let down the bars and opened the door of the byre. He could not understand Snailem's lateness. He made up his mind that if Snailem came home the worse for liquor he would be very sharp with him. Probably threaten to dismiss him.

He had adjusted the chains, and watered the cows, when he heard a horse tramping into the stable. A moment later a man entered the byre, a pitchfork in his hand. It was old Peek.

"Where is Snailem?" asked Derek, suspiciously.

Peek came close to him and said with a wavering grin: "He's gone. Gone for good, with them others. He said he couldn't stand the thought of Grimstone without Phœbe, and he didn't fancy a winter in the country anyways. I happened to be at the station when he was getting his

ticket and he asked me to please drive Mike home, and to tell you he'll return the eight dollars he got off you, as soon as he gets a job."

"The robber!" said Derek, bitterly. "He got me to advance the money so he could buy himself a pair of boots in Mistwell. I ought by rights to get the police after him. . . . But I'm glad he's gone. He was a poor tool. I believe I'm well rid of him."

"And the things he used to say about you and your missus at the barber's shop was scandalous. I used to say to him, 'Snailem, it's a dirty bird that fouls its own nest.' God's my witness, Mr. Vale, I said that to him time and again, and he'd say—"

"I don't want to hear what he said. Can you do this milking for me while I bed down the stock?"

Then and there he employed Peek and his half-grown grandson to work steadily by the week, and sleep at home.

Now he felt honestly glad to be rid of Snailem. The thought of his untidy face with its eternal ooze of tobacco juice was repugnant. Peek was a decent old chap, his grandson willing and strong. The fall work was in excellent shape. He should get on very well with outside help till spring, and, by George, he would make Fawnie do her part!

While Peek milked he strode to the house to look for her. He had unlocked the door into the hall long ago.

"Fawnie!" he called loudly from the dining room. "Come here!"

He heard her descending the stairs, and in a moment her face, bright and calm as an unruffled bird's, appeared in the doorway.

"Look here," he said, "You've got to come and feed the poultry, and put the turkeys out of the poultry house.

You've driven all the servants from the farm, so you must turn in and help yourself."

"How jolly!" she said. "I come this instant moment. I'll kill those turkeys surely."

"Don't feed the hens too much," he admonished, as they walked back to the barn. "The last time you fed them, they were all but crop bound with corn."

"I will make them drunk on silage," she said, gaily, "and I will teach them to sing a song of joy because Phœbe is gone. Oh, she is a bad one, that Phœbe. I peeped in her box as it stood on the back porch, and, what do you s'pose? She had taken two of the blue and gold cups and saucers —one apiece for them."

"I hope you took them out."

"I did, Durek. And I put in their place a sticky tin pie plate that she wouldn't scrape clean yesterday."

"Fawnie," said Derek, taking her hand. "I say it in all solemnity, you are more than a match for anyone I know."

The stock had been fed and bedded for the night; the poultry safely housed; the milk separated and set away to cool; old Peek was gone; and Derek stood leaning against a pillar of the porch, while his wife prepared the tea. He gazed at the quiet lake, at the pale star of the lighthouse just winking out against the sombre red of the sky. He saw the little gnarled trees on the bluff twisted into fantastic postures—the sport of Grimstone. And here was he who had come to Grimstone with a grand gesture of possession—its sport, too—bent to its will—his Indian wife cooking in the kitchen—his Indian son kicking on the bed. . . . His son was beginning to cry, as well as kick. "Coming, Buckskin!" he shouted, and went to him.

4.

Fawnie was surprisingly competent in the affairs of the

house. The living rooms looked no untidier than when under Phœbe's care. Buckskin's face was often clean. She cooked for Derek simple, yet quite eatable meals, and together they made a steamed pudding from a recipe in the Brancepeth *Era*, that turned out so well that they made themselves sick eating it. Mrs. Orde came from Mistwell twice a week to wash and scrub.

As the winter drew in and there was less to do, Derek left the work to the Peeks and lay in bed in the mornings till he felt like rising. Fawnie had learned to cook his bacon without burning it, and he would sit comfortably at his breakfast, the morning paper which Peek had brought propped up before him. But he read it with little interest. He was degenerating into a healthy animal with no horizon beyond the borders of its pasture. Now that Reciprocity had been defeated, he gave no further thought to the affairs of the country nor was interested to know what the new government was doing. He heard, unmoved, stories of Chard's success and of Hobbs' aggressive administering of the Durras estate. He had dismissed half of the labourers and was getting an equal amount of work from the remaining half, so Peek said, and so Hobbs himself confirmed when he came to call one wild November night, and sat by the open fire with them while the waves thundered on the shore and the gale drove the flames down the chimney.

Derek sat in the middle in the full firelight, the flames brightening to clear ruddiness his full fair face; Hobbs, on the right, his features sharpened by the darting shadows, his muddy legginged legs stretched on the hearth, his light eyes feasting on the beauty of Fawnie's face, as she sat opposite. Her eyes, glowing beneath the folds of dark hair, carefully encircled about her brow, were bent on the two blond men with a look of pensive, yet triumphant, ex-

perience. Hobbs's attitude towards her was deferential. He seemed to have forgotten the time when he had haled her before Mr. Jerrold for trapping one of his hares. Derek liked him for this, and when he went to the door with him, invited him to come again.

Moved by the friendliness of the moment, Hobbs told Derek that he had just become engaged to Miss Pearsall.

Derek was astonished beyond measure at the news. But he kept a sober face, and congratulated Hobbs earnestly. Yet when he awakened in the night and thought of the union of that posturing, affected girl, and that hard-bitten, fierce man, he shook the bed with cynical laughter.

Late in November came the first snowfall, a deep, yet exquisitely, fragile snowfall, that made a new enchanted world. The bare orchards were weighed with glittering fruit, the windows of the house peered forth like astonished eyes beneath lowering white brows. Peek's deep footprints from the barn were little blue caverns. Yet the sun was warm, and the sky a turquoise blue. The snow certainly could not last.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Fawnie," said Derek. "We'll get out the little red sleigh; and I'll wrap you and Buckskin in the buffalo robe, and we'll drive to Brancepeth. I need some new shirts and a pair of boots. Do you know, I haven't bought myself a blessed thing since I left Halifax!"

"Darling," replied Fawnie. "I'm surprised at you. As long as you have things for your own back you never notice that baby and I are naked. As a matter of fac', I'm nakeder than I was when I bought those last clothes, for they are wore out and my old ones, too. Winter is here and baby and I are naked. I s'pose I mus' go out to work like Mrs. Orde and make money to buy clothes."

"You do look shabby, and the kid, too," he returned,

ignoring her threat. "Well, wrap yourselves up warmly, and we'll buy clothes for everybody."

The gelding was wild to go. He sent little clots of snow on to the buffalo robe, and even against their faces. The air was like wine, the lake lay tranquil and bright below, its smooth surface only disturbed by the wet black heads of a flock of wild ducks swimming sharply near the shore. Durras flew past; then the Jerrolds' cottage. Derek gave one swift look at the little stable. Even the weather-vane on its gable was draped in white. Buckskin crowed and kicked with joy at the merry jingle of the sleighbells.

Brancepeth was a newborn village, white and pure, and only half awake. People in the street stopped to stare at the dashing red sleigh, and at dark little Mrs. Vale showing her white teeth in an assured smile.

Derek let her go into the milliner's shop alone. He sat outside holding the restive horse, and looking down with amusement at the round-faced infant beside him who stared from under his woollen cap with greenish blue eyes so like his own. Plainly he was fascinated by the aspect of the butcher's shop, next door to the milliner's. For a beautiful roe hung there by her heels, her disembowelled body stiff and taut, her pink tongue between her teeth, touching the pavement. And, as though that were not enough, there hung at the other side of his door, a burly black bear, his great paws with their curving claws pressed together as if in prayer.

"Deer!" said Derek, pointing with his whip, "Bear! Gun shot them."

Buckskin twitched from head to foot with excitement. He made inarticulate sounds of joy.

Fawnie came to the door of the millinery shop with a blue hat on her head. Did darling like it? Darling thought it was horrible and said so. It made her sallow. Then she

came wearing a red one with black wings. Not so bad; but it was a little brown one he chose with a fur band; just like a little French hat, the milliner followed Fawnie to the door to say. It certainly became her, and she wore it when she left, carrying her old one in a paper bag.

At the dry goods store she bought a brown coat with a fur collar, a plaid skirt, two blouses (she did not trouble much about underwear), and a pair of brown boots. There were things bought for Buckskin that only a woman knew how to buy, but Derek strode in himself, with the child on his arm, and bought him a little rabbit skin coat and a cap with earlugs.

Their presence created an agreeable excitement in the shops, for everyone knew their story, and customers and clerks alike craned their necks to catch a glimpse of that handsome young Mr. Vale and his Indian wife.

In the chemist's window a pyramid of pink soap caught Fawnie's eye. She must have some, and a new sponge for the baby. Derek waited outside while she made her purchases. . . .

They were opposite The Duke of York as the town bell struck the hour of noon. Of his own accord the horse turned in towards the stables. Fawnie said she was starving, and Derek realized that he himself was very hungry. He looked her over critically. In her dark ulster and little fur-trimmed toque she looked well-dressed, and incredibly lovely. Her cheeks were flushed with health and pleasure, her eyes had the brilliance of some furry forest animal's peering from under a bush. Her mouth and chin made him smile, they were so disdainful.

"How should you like," he asked, "to go in and have some dinner?"

"It would be jolly." But she showed no surprise.

"What about the kid?"

"You get me a room, darling, and I'll nurse him and lay him on the bed while we eat our dinner."

They left the horse with an ostler, and went into the low hall of the tavern. Fawnie, carrying Buckskin, mounted the stair, a servant with a dangling key following her, and Derek turned into the bar. It was well filled—a large comfortable bar, clean, smelling of ale and freshly burning hemlock. A porter was on his knees before the stove. As Vale drank his ale he watched the languid movements of the fellow. The porter, seeming to feel his gaze, looked up, and Derek saw it was Bob Gunn.

Bob's beady black eyes twinkled, whether with a friendly or malicious light, Derek could not tell.

"Well, how do you like your new job?"

"Fine. The pay's fair, the food's guid, and the commaircial men are free eneuch wi' their tips. It's better than fairm life anyway."

"But the hours are even longer."

"Ay, but there's something doing. Something to see. I'd liefer hear a stoker off one of the lake vessels curse, than listen tae Chaird's whingin' and whinin'. I'd liefer clean up the floor of the bar than dig in the freezing airth all day makin' drains, or hoe out weeds that are up again before your back's turned. Then you hear interestin' talk here, politeeks, religion, science, and the status of women in the wairld. There's nae sich thing as a dull hour." He was sitting on his heels, a stick of hemlock in his hand. He now looked up in Derek's face with his twinkling eyes. "By the way, we had a relation of yours in here lately."

"A relation of mine?" repeated Derek, mystified.

"Ay, Jammery. He was wanting a drink but, of course, we had tae order him out as he is on the Indian List. He objected, and contended that he was white. He looks pretty white, and speaks well, but he's connected with

them, so the bartender wouldn't take any risks. They'll be refusing you a drink next thing I'm thinking, Mr. Vale." His twinkle was altogether malicious now.

Suppressing a desire to kick him more thoroughly than he had done before, Vale paid for his ale and went out to find Fawnie. She was standing, a motionless little figure, just outside the dining room door.

The waitress, a plump young girl with an excellently white neck, led them to a table, and leaned over Derek to take the order. Fawnie solemnly unfolded her bluish white damp table napkin, folded in the shape of a bishop's mitre. Derek ordered soup, roast pork and apple-sauce. "Remember," he whispered, when the girl had gone, "to keep that knife away from your mouth, and just break small bits off your bread."

Fawnie nodded obediently. She behaved like a good child. They had but well begun when a robust voice greeted Derek, and looking up, he beheld Mr. Ramsey.

"Well met," he said cheerily. "This is an unexpected treat. May I sit down and have my dinner with you? You know I take most of my meals here, and I find it very pleasant."

He shook hands with them and sat down. "Yes, Katy, some roast pork. And a bit of the nice juicy rind. And don't be sparing with the apple-sauce. I find I cannot flourish without plenty of apple-sauce."

While the Vicar ate with gusto he talked buoyantly of things in general. He was glad they had won the election. The fruit market was safe, thank goodness. . . . His pullets were beginning to lay. But he had lost a fine cockerel last week from limberneck. Strange disease. Head flopping all over the place. . . . Did Derek see much of the Jerrolds? Mr. Jerrold had certainly been hard hit by the sale. But he was plucky. They had happy

times in the cottage every Sunday afternoon. He always took tea with them on Sunday. . . . And Hobbs! One could scarcely imagine Miss Pearsall caring for him. She was so extremely refined. But Love laughed at Manners. Really, he was an unmannerly little rascal himself. . . . Hobbs had been to church twice lately. After all Miss Pearsall would make a charming mistress for Durras.

Derek saw that Mr. Ramsey was giving sharp glances at Fawnie's face. He turned and looked at her himself, and almost dropped his fork in horror at what he saw. Evidently when she had been at the chemist's she had bought some atrocious face powder and in the seclusion of the bedroom had wantonly smeared her cheeks with it. It must have been intended for a strawberry blonde, for it was a light pink with a strong hint of mauve that stood out on her dusky face with terrible effrontry.

Derek, flushing red himself, whispered to her fiercely: "Go upstairs and rub that powder off your face. Get it every bit off, and fetch the baby. We're going."

"But I haven't finished my pudding."

"Do as I tell you."

Fawnie rose, and with bent head glided from the room. The Vicar moved near to Vale. "Poor child," he said, "they have given her the wrong tint. . . . Now there is a powder," lowering his voice confidently, "I've read about it in the advertisements—for really dark skin. It's called Rachel, I believe. If she got that I believe it would answer nicely."

"Rachel"—repeated Vale, comforted by the Vicar's sympathetic attitude.

"Yes, Rachel. Probably pronounced in the French way Rachelle. . . . I think your wife is charming to look at; and full of intelligence, one can see. I'm sure you have never regretted that I advised you in this matter."

"Everything's all right," replied Vale, uncomfortable again.

They waited at the bottom of the stairs for Fawnie, who came down carrying the baby.

The powder had been washed off, and she was radiant with pride in the child in his snowy new rabbit-skin coat and cap. The Vicar stared at him in astonished admiration. And, indeed, he had the composed air of a princling. His golden-brown skin, his long greenish eyes, the bright curl on his forehead were charming.

"You must bring him to me and have him christened," said Mr. Ramsey.

"All right," said Derek. "His name is Buckskin."

CHAPTER IX

Jammery

1.

The more Derek watched Fawnie, the more he thought of her as the completest human being he had ever known. Her days were a circle of unthinking happiness, from the moment when she put her baby to her breast in the morning, to the time when she warmed her bare feet before the open fire, before she went to bed. She could not write; she could not read. Derek, after a few attempts at lessons, when her docility and utter lack of receptiveness almost put him asleep, gave it up. Why disturb that happy serenity? Her ignorance was astonishing. The king lived "up at a place called England"—some village, doubtless, about the Georgian Bay. She had heard that rich people had no chance of going to Heaven, but "us poor folk can pass right through." Then, remembering that she herself was now rich, she said she didn't mind. The poor might have it all to themselves.

She warned Derek that American hordes were liable at any time to advance on them from Niagara. It was well to be on the watch. This did not worry her in the least, but merely added to the zest of her days. As a matter of fact, she did not worry about anything. She just lived. That alone kept her happy and busy.

She would spend hours sitting in her little gilt chair before the pier glass, arranging, with meticulous care, the convolutions of burnished hair that enfolded her placid brow. She was always cheerful, she was usually good-

tempered, yet Derek had glimpses of primitive cruelty within. He had seen her knock a rabbit on the head with a stick and smile at its whimpering. She had told him, showing all her little teeth, how ermines were trapped by the licking of frosty steel—held to the trap by their tongues. Wasn't that fonny? Yet she would sit on the floor by Jock, the collie, and stroke him till he was hypnotized.

Derek loved to watch her. He became more and more contented. And yet—he was never ten minutes alone without beginning to dream about Grace Jerrold. He would picture what his life might have been had he married her. He could not forget her. He thought it strange that he should be living in comparative content with one woman, while his mind dwelt with another.

2.

One foggy morning in mid-December Derek was confronted in the lane by the figure of a man who stepped suddenly from the shelter of a little clump of cedars. It was Jammery.

"Good morning, Mr. Vale," he said in his soft voice. "I guess you're surprised to see me, eh?"

"Yes, I am. The last I heard of you was from Bob Gunn at The Duke of York."

Jammery's brow darkened. "Yes, they refused me a drink for being an Indian, which was hardly fair for, as I've told you I can't even speak their language. I may have a dash of the bow and arrow in me, but it's far enough away. It was Bob who testified I was an Indian, curse him." Though he had frowned, his voice was gentle as ever.

Derek walked on down the lane. The sod was wet and spongy, for the snow had melted, and the creek, swollen by snow and rain, rushed in coffee-coloured torrents between

its steep red banks. Jammery kept abreast of Derek and raised his voice above the roar of the water.

"How's Fawnie, Mr. Vale?"

"Very well."

"And the baby?"

"He's well, too."

"I suppose you're quite settled down together?"

"Quite."

"I hope Fawnie has got rid of her Indian ways."

They had reached the gate leading into the paddock, and with his hand on it Vale turned sharply to Jammery in a sudden temper.

"Now," he said, "Be off. I've had enough of you."

"Don't get annoyed, Mr. Vale. I didn't mean anything harmful. You're so passionate, I'm afraid to say what I came to say. It's a proposal I came a long way to make."

"I don't care to hear it."

"But you may thank me for it afterwards."

"Well, go ahead," said Derek, his curiosity aroused.

"You won't lay hands on me if it angers you?"

"I won't promise that. You'd better go while you're safe."

"No. I'll say what I came for, but you must remember I mean no harm—to her or to you."

Derek regarded him steadily but made no reply.

"It's about Fawnie," Jammery went on nervously. "I've heard it said that marrying her has ruined your life, that none of your neighbours have anything to do with you, that you can't keep any help, and that the farm is going to rack and ruin."

"Well, what would you do about it if—it were the case?"

"I'd propose—" he drew nearer, while modulations of greed, boldness, and watchfulness flitted like shadows across his thin, strangely handsome face, "to relieve you of

Fawnie—to take her away—and keep her safely where she'd never trouble you—you could get a divorce—and be free—as though nothing had happened."

"Oh," said Derek, sarcastically. "And am I to pay you well for this? Where do you come in?"

"I don't ask a cent," he cried with vehemence. "You think Indians care for nothing but money! Don't you think we can love? It would be all I'd ask—just having Fawnie! She's no wife for you. You're no husband for her. She's like an animal trapped in your fine house yonder." His eyes burned with scorn; he pressed his supple hand against his heart as though its throbbing hurt him.

"Why," asked Derek, "if you were so fond of her, did you scheme to get her married to me?"

"It was because I was so fond of her. I wanted to see her a lady. And I'd nothing to do with her having your child, did I? That started things going. . . . The old woman thought they could all sponge on you. The girl was crazy to marry you. I didn't know then what it would be like to live away from her."

"Had you never thought of marrying her yourself?"

"Not me. I knew too well what the old woman was. She'd have never let me out of her clutches. Mr. Vale, she's the worst old devil that ever lived, and Beulah is going to be just like her. Now Esther and Fawnie are like the old man. There was something noble about him, a regular old chief he was." Silence fell between the two men, broken only by the volleying of the stream as it rushed under the bridge and into the lake. The fog closed upon them more heavily; a hoarse whistle from some ploughing steamer vibrated across the lake. Jammery drummed nervously on the gate with his fingres.

"You wouldn't believe," he said, "how I've loved that girl. I didn't seem to realize it when she was always in my

sight. But since she's gone—why, I've lost flesh; I've gone to skin and bone." It was true that the fellow was starved looking. "She's one of those women, I guess, that a man can't never forget. There's some like that. Sweet to love and yet—they make you what they want to—they eat into your heart like the consumption into your lungs. They're like a disease, and nothing but having them'll cure you. . . . I always think Fawnie's like a lily. . . . You'd say a dark lily. . . . Maybe . . . one of those gold-coloured ones with the heavy scent. . . ."

Derek was amused, yet irritated; and the air was chill. Again the hoarse voice of the steamer sounded. He shivered, passed through the gate, and closed it after him. Then he hesitated and turned back to Jammery.

"Look here," he said. "What about that beating. Was that a put-up game?"

"Just to excite you," replied Jammery, with the shadow of a smile. "The bleating of the kid excites the tiger. The old woman bribed Fawnie to take it. It was done the night before. The girl laid down on a bunk and never made a sound. I had to get out. I couldn't bear to hear the blows."

"You and the mother are a pretty pair of scoundrels," said Derek, "that's all I can say. And I advise you to get out of here while the going's good." He extended his arm towards the road.

Jammery drew back from the advancing hand as though he feared a blow, then after one searching look into Derek's face he turned away along the bank of the creek. When he reached the path that bordered it and led to the road, he shouted back something that Derek could not hear because of the roar of the water, and raised his hand toward heaven. A moment later he had disappeared into the fog.

3.

That night as they sat before a glowing fire Derek saw Fawnie in a new light. He saw her as one of the conspirators who had schemed to entrap him. He felt no resentment, only wonder that he could have been so deceived, and, as the dancing firelight sharpened and distorted her features and made the bands of hair about her brow gleam like the silken folds of snakes, he felt a sort of terror of her. What had she done to his life? What would she do?

As she raised her hand in a slow gesture to smooth her hair, the bracelet on her rounded arm caught the light. He said: "Once you promised me that some time you would tell me how you came by that bracelet. Tell me now."

The velvet eyes slid slyly under the fringe of inky lashes that threw a pointed shadow on her cheek. "I said I would tell you some time when I want to make you laugh. I don' want to make you laugh tonight. I want to make you lov' me." Gently she turned to the bracelet on her arm.

"Very well," replied Derek. "If you will not tell me, I shall tell you."

"Yes?" The pencilled eyebrows were raised until they met the drooping band of hair.

"Your mother gave it to you to ease the pain of a beating—that was to excite me."

She winced a little at the remembrance of the beating, but she said with serenity,

"That was fonny, wasn't it?" She took a cigarette from a little taborette that stood between them, and leaned towards him for a light. Their eyes met but an inch or two apart and he sought to fathom the depths of those dark-fringed pools flecked with dancing light.

Emitting the fragile blue smoke through her nostrils, she said slowly: "And now I tell you, darling, how you come to find that out. Jammery, he told you."

"Has he been here?" A pulse began to beat sharply in Derek's throat. He wished he had thrown the scoundrel into the road.

"Yes, Durek. And, as a matter of fac', I gave him some cold meat and a cup of tea. Poor Jammery! He looks very bad. His heart is certainly broke."

Derek leaned forward, his face dark with anger, and grasped her knee. "By the Lord Harry, girl," he said, roughly, "if ever you let that fellow into the house again, I'll thrash you myself, and I'll give you no bracelet to help you bear the pain."

Fawnie took his hand from her knee and raised it to her forehead. "You have given me a ring already," she whispered. "And, as a matter of fac', if you beat me I will lov' you more than ever. Isn't that fonny?"

4.

The following week Hobbs had as a guest the most prominent Holstein breeder in the Province. He invited Derek to spend an evening with them; and they had cigars in a little office he had fitted up for himself in a corner of the house where Derek had never been. It was hard to believe that this echoing half-empty house was the one where he had spent such happy hours with the Jerrolds.

Yet he enjoyed the evening, since it broke the monotony of things. The Holstein breeder talked well, and Hobbs was less assertive in his presence. Derek was invited to return the next afternoon to inspect the cattle with the great man. He spent an interesting afternoon, and set out for home feeling elated over some excellent hints he had got. The breeder was to come over the next day to look over his stock. He was interested in what he had heard of the young prize-winning bull.

Lake and land were sunk in damp oblivion. A chill air rose from the muddy road to mingle with the steady drench-

ing mist. A homespun longing to get back to Fawnie and the boy urged Derek cheerfully through the wet. He was surprised to see no light in the house. Fawnie disliked the twilight, and usually lighted the lamps when the first shadow fell.

When he reached the gate he heard the child crying, not the lusty cry of temper, nor the peevish cry of sleepiness, but an outraged, rhythmic wail that subsided now and then into an exhausted gurgle. Derek, with a sudden fear at his heart—Fawnie might be ill or hurt—hurried to the door. Inside it was dark, and the child on hearing the door open held his breath, so Derek did not at once discover where he lay.

He went to the kitchen, struck a match and took a lamp from the lamp shelf. With it lighted he returned to the dining room. The child lay on the settle near the fireplace, but the fire was low and the room cold.

The baby began to crow and kick with joy at seeing him, but Derek paid no attention to him, and with the lamp held high he went down the step into the front of the house. He stood irresolutely in the hallway a moment, and then called, "Fawnie!" loudly. There was no sound in answer except the labored ticking of the old clock whose blank white face stared at him from the end of the hall. He called again, now angrily, "Fawnie! Fawnie!"

No answer.

He went through the drawing-room, his bedroom. At the foot of the stairs he called again. . . . The child was giving short, despairing yells. He returned to the dining room, set the lamp on the table, and picked up the baby and kissed it. With a gesture of affection, that it had only lately acquired, it clasped its little arms about his neck and pressed close to him. Its wet face snuggled against his cheek.

"Poor little fellow," he said, kissing it again and again. "Was he left all alone?"

On the mantel leaning against the china greyhound a half sheet of note-paper caught his eye. He took it to the light and with the child on his arm bent forward to read: Mister Vale.

Dear Sir:

Just a line to say that Fawnie has decided as you are no husband for her she has decided to get out of here which is like a trap and her a poor thing trapped. You thot you were through with me didn't you but you weren't. She says to give baby milk warmed out of the bottle and some sugar and biscuits, etc. Any old thing you like I don't care please do not try to find us for if you do by god I'll run a nife into Fawnie before you can get her.

Yours, etc.,

Jammery.

The baby clutched at the paper laughing, then he reached for the flame of the lamp. Derek moved away from the table and, seating himself on the settle, he re-read the note.

One thing came clearly out of the sprawling jumble of words: Fawnie had run away with Jammery.

She had left her baby. The unnatural little devil. He was alone with the baby. What in God's name should he do? Why hadn't he wrung Jammery's neck that day by the creek? He had felt like it. Why had he allowed himself to be hoodwinked into such a marriage? Talk about traps . . . . he was the trapped one. . . . If he only had his hands on Jammery! He struck the arm of the settle with his clenched fist.

Fawnie gone.

He could not imagine the house without her. Here he was alone—alone. Except for an eight months' old baby. It hungry, too. It was yelling again and cramming its fist in its mouth. Had she had it in her mind to leave him

when she had bought that feeding bottle a fortnight ago and begun to teach the child to drink from it? God only knew what she had in her mind—that devious, calculating, rapacious mind of hers. How he hated her!

He thought of her little satiny brown neck—he would like to squeeze it till her eyes would start—those melting, shining, animal eyes.

The child made its mouth enormous and stiffened its body. He gave it a sharp shake. Damned little half-breed! He had a mind to throw it into the road after its mother. He grinned at the thought and shook it again. It ceased crying and looked up in his face with heartbroken astonishment, its mouth down at the corners, its round fists, wet with slobber, raised appealingly. Its eyelids were puffed with crying.

Derek's heart was touched. He got up with a sigh. "I wonder where that bottle is," he said aloud.

He found it on the kitchen table and beside it a jug of milk. He lifted a lid of the range and examined the fire. It was not a bad fire; he dug the coals with a poker and opened the draughts. The child, sitting on his arm, looked on hopefully.

It sat perfectly still when he put it on the table, while he heated some milk in a saucepan, sweetened it, tasted it, and filled the bottle; but it twitched with excitement when he took it up again and held the rubber nipple to its mouth. Its bare feet, he noticed, were icy cold.

He drew a chair before the oven and sat down with the baby on his knee, holding the little feet to the warmth. Jock, with a loud, troubled yawn, came and sat close beside.

As the baby felt the warmth of the oven, the comfort of Derek's supporting arm, and the yielding nipple in his mouth, he heaved a sigh of weary contentment and rolled

his eyes up towards his father's face and kept them there, as though he wished never to lose sight of him again.

"You—and me, Buckskin—and old Jock—the three of us, eh?" murmured Derek. "And a night as black as pitch. I wish them luck, that pair. Curse him for a whining scoundrel. . . . And the girl, to go off and leave you like this, and me." He caught himself up, for an ache like a gripping hand caught him by the throat and his nose stung. Good God! he wasn't going to cry. Well—it would make a man cry to see a baby left like this.

He put his lips against the fair downy head and kept them there.

CHAPTER X

Pegleg

1.

*D*EREK could not sleep. He went to bed, but at two o'clock he rose and drew on some clothes. Restlessly he walked about the house, turning over different plans in his head. If it were not for the child he would have closed the house and returned to Halifax. Yet he had no yearnings for his old life there. Grimstone and he seemed to belong to one another. And the child—a new rush of tenderness for it swept through him. When all was said and done, it was his child and he loved it with all the protective strength of his nature.

He had no intention of following Fawnie and Jammery. He would not touch her again, if she came on her knees. He believed Jammery loved her—more than he ever could—and she was very sweet to love. As Jammery had said, one couldn't ever forget her. It was impossible to think that she would sit before the fire in the evening no more—with the ruddy glow on her face, on her supple folded hands, on her bracelet touching it to fire. That damned bracelet—the hypocrisy of her! "If you beat me I will lov' you more than ever." He longed to kill her, and tramped up and down the hollow echoing house, saying so, to the walls, to the streaming windows, to the black hearth.

At six o'clock he made himself some breakfast and fed the child who, exhausted by the excitement of the day before, went immediately to sleep again. Lighting his pipe,

he sat down before the kitchen stove and dozed till he was awakened by Peek bringing in the milk.

It was a mild morning of delicate blue sky and little white clouds like puffs of smoke. Sparrows pecked and twittered on the flags outside the kitchen door as though it were spring. Derek carried Buckskin out for an airing and strolled up and down in the sunshine. Both were bareheaded and Buckskin held a large sweet apple from which he with difficulty took small bites with his square little teeth. Derek had washed his face and hands and brushed his hair so that he was fresh as the morning. He cooed, he laughed, he pressed wet kisses on Derek's cheek, and kicked his heels on Derek's side as though to lose his mother was a matter of light concern. After one questioning look at Derek he had taken his breakfast from the bottle without more ado, as one who said, "Bottle is it? Well, here goes!" A remarkable baby.

Derek held him close. He would not have parted with him for worlds.

He was so taken up with the child that he did not see a group of people coming down the road until they had turned in at the gate. Then he perceived that they were Indians. The group was composed of a man, his wife, three little girls, a grown-up son. The man, terribly emaciated, leaned heavily on the squaw's shoulder. The young man carried several large bundles and an old-fashioned carpet bag. He set them down with a grunt of weariness as he reached Derek's side, but he turned to his mother as though it had been arranged that she was to speak first.

She was a wholesome, good-looking woman of about five and forty. Her clothes were clean and neat, and her three little girls, who resembled pretty Italian children, looked decently cared for. After taking her breath, for she had been much burdened, she said in a soft, husky voice: "I

been told that you ain't got much help here. We thought maybe you could do with us. My son and me we're both good milkers, and he's good with horses and all kinds of farm work."

"But I have no place to lodge you in," said Derek. "The shack isn't fit for winter."

"Oh, we'll make it all right," replied the squaw easily. "We just come from an awful poor one now. Our floor was never dry. I can do your housework, too. My goodness, that's a nice baby you got." She stared curiously at the child. Evidently she knew all about his marriage.

The man broke in, "I can't go no further, I tell you. I must get in some place and lie down or I'll die."

He looked fit to die, Derek thought. He said:

"Well you may come and look over the shack. If you think you can live in it, I'll give you work." With Buckskin on his shoulder he led the way through the orchard.

A little windmill made by Bobby Sharroe turned with a whining noise on the roof of the shack. The outer walls were ornamented with skins of squirrels and chipmunks he had nailed there to dry, and, in the row at leaving, had forgotten. The stove in the lean-to was red with rust.

"Bill and me will carry that stove inside," said the woman. "We'll be fine and warm. Kin we have fresh straw fer the bunks? And maybe you have an old quilt you not usin'?"

"Come to the house and I'll give up a couple," said Vale. "Have you food?"

"We got bread and ham. If we jus' had some tea and a point of milk and a little drippin' or butter we'd git on fine."

She was such an amiable, wholesome soul Derek liked her at once. And he liked the little girls who fluttered about the baby, clapping their hands at him, and laughing

as merrily as though they had never known hunger and cold and buffeting from post to pillar. They were the prettiest Indian children he had ever seen, with even features and magnificent black eyes. They were Annie, Lizzie and Susy, aged nine, seven, and five.

The man had gone into the added room and thrown himself on the bare bed there with a groan. Derek looked in at him and then asked the son what was the trouble with him. He mentioned a disease common enough, but of which Derek knew little. "Is it serious?" he asked.

"Oh, I guess not," replied the youth. "He's just got to keep still and he'll git all right."

Derek looked pityingly at the hunched figure on the bed. "Let me know if he needs anything. And cover him up or he'll freeze."

He was getting cold himself standing about and Buckskin was sneezing in his ear. He returned to the house, taking the son with him to get provisions for the family. The youth said his name was Bill Rain. He was a hollow-cheeked, hollow-chested fellow, who always gave the impression that he had just reached the top of a steep hill. But he said he was strong and seemed eager to work.

Derek felt an immense relief at having acquired the Rain family. He would pay off Peek that night, and Peek could stop at the Orde's cottage on his way back to Mistwell and tell Mrs. Orde that she would not be needed at Grimstone for some time. He hoped that by ridding himself of Mistwell people he might be able to conceal the fact that Fawnie had deserted him. For the present, at least, that was his great need. The Jerrolds, Hobbs, the Vicar, it must be hidden from them all. He had been the subject of gossip, conjecture, pity, scorn, long enough. No. It must not be known. He might conceal it for a month—or more. Fur-

ther than that he did not look. He would not even tell Edmund.

Before Hobbs and the Holstein breeder whose name was Maher, left that afternoon Derek took them into the house for something to drink. When the whiskey and soda had been set on the table Hobbs asked after the health of Mrs. Vale. Mrs. Vale was not very well, Derek said. She was lying down. Hobbs was disappointed. He had been anxious to have Maher meet her. As the bottle became almost empty he grew more and more solicitous for her health, and he begged Derek to fetch the boy down, if only for a moment, that Maher might see for himself the sort of heir she had produced for Grimstone. So Buckskin came on Derek's shoulder, very bright-eyed and wondering, and was set on Mr. Maher's knee, and was hefted, and had his muscles felt, and his massive legs admired, and his eight teeth admired, and his curly yellow head rumpled, and Maher said he was the sweetest thing that had ever been foaled. "If you'll believe me," he said, "my missus has given me six daughters, all of them high-shouldered and short-necked—like me. Nary a son. Women are kittle cattle. Nary a son."

"Give me boys every time," said Hobbs. "If a boy misbehaves you give him a good leatherin', if he does it again you give him a harder one—but a girl—keep your six, Maher, I don't want 'em."

"They're all right," declared Maher, bridling. "They're nice girls—good and all that—but why had they got to go and have high shoulders and thick necks like me?"

Derek scarcely heard their talk. An overwhelming weight of loneliness had fallen on him. Fawnie was gone. No more would she sit beside him watching the fire, with that mysterious, sombrous look that had sometimes almost frightened him; no more would her hair fall like a silken

mantle over his shoulder, around his neck; and her arms hold him close against her—"as a matter of fac', darling, you are no better than Buckskin"—Oh, the sweetness of those arms! Their fragility—and their strength—those pouting lips. And she loved Jammery—He could not hear what those fellows were saying. How he dreaded the night!

2.

But the night passed quickly. Tired out from lack of sleep, his head had barely touched the pillow when he was off. A dreamless sleep held him till daylight, when he was awakened by Buckskin whom he had taken to bed with him to keep him warm. Buckskin cooed, he crowed, he chuckled, he lifted Derek's eyelid and looked quizzically down into his eye. "Good Lord," groaned Derek, "can't you let your poor dad sleep in peace?" Buckskin could not and would not, so Derek got up and made the breakfast.

They sat side by side at table (Buckskin had a high chair) unwashed and uncombed, eating large plates of porridge covered with cream. Buckskin's bib was a sight. Derek wondered what Edmund would have said.

"The first thing for you to do," he told Lottie Rain when she came to do the work, "is to give this baby a bath. He's got soap and sponge and everything of his own. Don't let him get a chill. Keep him by the stove. And look here—" he turned in the doorway—"My wife is away but I don't want the folk about here to gossip, so if anyone asks you anything, just say she's not very well, and she stops in most of the time. Understand?"

Lottie's face melted into a comprehending smile. "Yes, I understan' all that. I know how to keep quiet. I know your wife ever since she was a little girl. It was her sent me back to look after you and the baby. She couldn't bear to think you wasn't gittin' looked after properly." . . .

So Lottie took them in hand. She was a motherly decent soul. She scrubbed the kitchen till the boards shone; she blackened the stove, and swept the hearth; she kept Buckskin cleaner than his mother had done. His bath in the kitchen was a melodious riot of chuckles, squeals, splashings, and the rippling laughter of the three little girls. The laughter of little Indian girls is the prettiest laughter in the world.

Derek grew to love Buckskin more every day. He became the centre of his life. He feared sometimes that Fawnie might return and steal him away, and he would not have him often out of his sight. He took long rides at this time and he would have Lottie bundle the boy in his rabbit-skin coat and cap, and place him before him on the horse. Off they would gallop, making the snow fly, making the bridge ring with the dash of hoofs. Buckskin would gravely clutch a bit of the rein in his tiny mittened hands, and his cheeks would glow, and his eyes sparkle and glint with all the changeful brightness of the lake. He learned to shout "Ho!" for "Whoa."

One day they met the Jerrolds. There was no escape, and Derek must face Grace with that offspring of his wildness and his weakness between them. Grace leaned forward in her saddle to look into the little rosy face. "Oh, he is a darling!" she breathed. "A darling." Her arms moved toward him without her volition, as though she must take him to her breast and hold him.

Surprise and delight made Derek's heart pound. Grace liked his child—that child. Gratitude misted his vision of her. He drew his horse nearer that she might touch the boy. She lifted him to the saddle before her and kissed him. Nothing small about Grace—nothing grudging—nothing cruel. Their eyes met over the boy's head—they could

not look away—yes—they were kissing each other through him—holding each other close.

3.

On Christmas Eve came a knock at the door where there were now but few knocks to disturb the lonely master of the house. Mr. Jerrold in a fur greatcoat stood there, his accustomed cigar in his fingers. He and Gay and Miss Pearsall, who was stopping with them over the holiday, were on their way to Mistwell where he had a Christmas tree every year for the village children. They looked forward to it all year, and, by Jove, he wasn't going to have the poor little beggars disappointed, even though he had been smitten rather roughly. Would Vale care to come? And Mrs. Vale? He spoke with genial unconcern, as though it were quite the custom for Mrs. Vale to join in their little activities. It was such a fine starlit night they were walking.

Derek had been feeling abominably homesick for Halifax and Edmund. He said eagerly that he would be glad to go, but Fawnie couldn't very well leave the baby. This time he blamed it on the baby. He wasn't quite up to the mark. Stomach ache or something. Kids were always getting something wrong. He grew hot with nervousness, but nothing would have induced him to tell the truth.

The girls had walked on ahead. Their slight figures outlined against the sparkling snow hurried on, as though avoiding the men. "Let them go," said Mr. Jerrold. "I want a good talk with you."

They overtook them at the door of the little weather-beaten town hall already packed with the children and their parents. A curtain was drawn before the tree, and Derek was led behind this by the girls to help light candles and

add some final touches while Mr. Jerrold disappeared into a cupboard to dress for the part of Santa Claus.

This unexpected nearness to Grace excited Derek. The expression of her face as she raised it when she lighted a candle was to him piercingly beautiful. Their hands touched. He drew his quickly away. He could not bear it. . . . Miss Pearsall hovered about the tree, ecstatic over dolls, work-boxes, horns, and jack-knives. "I feel a little, little child again," she breathed. And again she said, "My name is Joy. I am but two days old." Derek thought—"My God, this woman and Hobbs!"

Never was a handsomer, more jovial Santa Claus than Mr. Jerrold. Such a scarlet belted tunic, such a woolly white beard, such mirthful, sparkling, teasing eyes. He joked everyone as he handed down the presents, for he knew them all, and the little hall rocked and heaved with laughter; and the smell of the tree, and the smell of guttering candles, and the smell of hot children were delightfully mingled with the smell of fish that subtly pervaded all gatherings in Mistwell.

After the tree there were sandwiches, cakes, and coffee for everybody.

It was eleven o'clock when Mr. Jerrold with a grunt of relief pulled off his beard and wig and mopped his dripping head. "I wouldn't give up this treat for anything," he said.

"I have not forgotten those three little girls at your place," said Grace to Vale. "And here are two little china mugs and a work-box for them—and a bag of sweets and an orange apiece, too."

"Oh, that will be jolly for them! I'm such a duffer I had never given Christmas a thought."

Miss Pearsall flew to get coloured paper and ribbon to tie up the parcel. "Darling Gay," she said, "always so thoughtful."

Unseen by the others, Derek picked up a discarded doll from the floor and dropped it into the pocket of his overcoat. The doll had only one leg.

It was refreshing to get out into the sharp bright air, to hear the crunch of the crisp snow beneath their feet, to watch the silvery moon sailing above and its bright train shimmering on the lake. It was a world of silver light and meticulous black shadows.

They walked four abreast.

"Happy, happy people!" exclaimed Miss Pearsall. "Going about doing good!"

"Nonsense. We get as much fun out of it as the kids," said Mr. Jerrold.

"Oh, Mr. Vale!" cried Miss Pearsall. "Do you know the Gitanjali?"

"No," replied Vale. "Where do they live?"

"They are not people but poems. By Tagore. I am singing them now. They are wonderful."

"You sing them beautifully," said Grace.

"There is no one like Tagore. No one like the Hindoo writers. I am in closer touch with the Infinite since I have steeped myself in the East than ever before. 'I am a slave of this spirit of the quest.'"

Mr. Jerrold was saying, "By Jove, I've gone and lost my pipe."

Vale was thinking, "My God! This woman and Hobbs —hard-bitten Hobbs."

Miss Pearsall went on: "I have no faith in doctors. Absolutely none. No doctor could ever cure one of my headaches. Only God can cure my headaches." Her eyes glistened in the moonlight.

Mr. Jerrold was saying: "They sent me some pretty poor stuff from the wholesale. One of those dolls, for instance, I had to throw away. The plaster was all broken

off its foot and the wooden support stuck out for all the world like a ridiculous wooden leg."

At the gate of Grimstone Vale held Grace's hand a moment. "If only I might have walked beside you—had a few words alone with you."

She withdrew hers quickly. "Oh, do you think I'm made of iron?" she said.

4.

Derek gave Lottie Rain the presents for her little girls. He bolted the kitchen door after her and returned to the dining room. He raised the flame of the lamp and sat down by the table. Then, with a whimsical smile, he drew the doll from his pocket. He held her close to the lamp and examined her matted yellow hair and glassy blue eyes. "You look terribly cold in that pink shimmy," he said, "and you certainly have a game leg. But I'm sure Buckskin will love you. Poor little Buckskin. His first Christmas. No mother. . . . We must find a name for you. H'm. Pegleg? That's the ticket. You shall be Pegleg from now on. . . ."

Buckskin made a scarcely perceptible mound under the yellow eiderdown in the huge four-poster. The bedroom was bitterly cold, for there was no way of heating it. Derek made short work of undressing, but he spent some time in choosing the best possible spot to lay Pegleg on, so that the sight of her might greet the child when he awoke. Then, when he had braced her there between the two pillows, he stood a full minute admiring the effect.

5.

Buckskin loved Pegleg at first sight. He wakened Derek in the cold December dawn crowing over her. He sat up in bed with his curls on end hugging and kissing her. He pulled her hair and bit her in a fury of love. He held her

while he was being dressed (not a long ceremony, for he wore but three garments) he clutched her while he had his bottle, he screamed if Derek touched her. And Derek would touch her just for the pleasure of hearing him yell.

After breakfast Derek carried him to the barn to weigh him. Annie, Lizzie, and Susy danced about the weighing scales singing:

"Buckskin weighs twenty pounds! Buckskin and Pegleg weigh twenty pounds."

"It's Christmas Day, Mister Vale," cried Lizzie, the prettiest of the three. "My brother Bill is goin' to take us to church."

"Where, then? To Mistwell?"

"No. To Stead. The niggers have got a church there. You know the nigger church?"

Derek had heard of it. Mrs. Machin had told him how, during the American Civil War, several southern families had taken refuge in the beautiful little village of Stead, a few miles east of Mistwell. When the war was over they had returned to their own country but, as the servants they had with them were now free, they left them behind in Stead, first providing them with cottages and situations. These slaves had been the nucleus of a respectable little coloured colony in Stead. They kept to themselves, were prosperous, prolific, and had their own pastor, whose collar and cuffs, it is safe to say, were whiter and shinier than those of any other minister in the village.

"To the nigger church," repeated Derek, looking at Lizzie, musingly. "Now, look here, if your mother and father are Indians, and you, yourself, go to the nigger church, I'd like to know what you are."

Lizzie's great eyes flashed up at him as she cried stoutly, "Me? I'm British!"

"Lizzie, you rebuke me," said Derek. "You're an in-

trepid little soul. May I shake hands?" And he took the little brown hand and held it in his own. "Good for you, Lizzie."

He led her to the stable, where Bill and Lottie were filling the mangers with hay. "Mister Vale, is it true," asked Annie, "that God was born in a stable?"

"Why, yes," said Derek. "It's true."

"Was a manger really his cradle, just like these here ones?"

"Yes. Only it was Jesus, you know, the little one. Not God. At least, not exactly."

"Well, Mister Vale, you lay Buckskin down in the manger and let's see just what a baby in a manger looks like, eh?"

"Ain't they awful?" said Bill.

Derek laid Buckskin in the Welsh pony's manger and held the pony's head to one side. "There you are," he said. They filled the stable with their laughter, and the morning sunlight fell on the sweet-smelling hay, and on Buckskin's blond head and golden brown face.

Annie said: "We'll be the three Wise Men. We'll bring him gifts. I'll bring him this big Northern Spy apple. What'll you bring, Susy?"

"This new egg I jus' find," answered Susy.

"An' you, Lizzie? What'll you give this little Jesus?"

"There's thistles in this hay," said Lizzie of the great dark eyes. "I'll make him a crown o' thorns."

Bill and Lottie, their pitchforks in their hands, stood gazing fascinated. Lottie said: "Last winter we was at a place where them little girls went to Sunday-school all winter. They learned an awful lot of religion. I expect it'll do them the rest of their lives."

Derek had given the Rains a turkey for dinner and he had one to himself. Buckskin sat beside him in his high

chair, alternately gnawing a drumstick and beating his tray with it. After dinner Derek had a happy thought. He went to one of the trunks he had not unpacked since he had come from Halifax and unearthed his most cherished boyhood possession, a glass-covered box of carefully mounted butterflies. These he presented to Buckskin who gazed, round-eyed, clutching Pegleg to his breast.

CHAPTER XI

Love among the Hummocks

1.

*H*obbs got his knee put out in the New Year while playing hockey with a team composed of his own workmen against the Mistwell players. He was confined to his room for five weeks and Derek spent an hour or two every day with him, smoking, talking endlessly about cattle breeding and poultry raising, and playing chess, for which it turned out Hobbs had a passion.

Of his other passion—that concerning Miss Pearsall—he talked little and haltingly, but Derek gathered that he was acquiring her as a suitable mistress for Durras, one who would give a tone to the place that he never could. Derek found this rather pathetic, and he pitied Hobbs. He should not have liked to be tied up to Miss Pearsall himself and he wished Hobbs would not do it, but the man was determined that Durras should not lack tone. "The one drawback is," he confided, "that I shall have to go to church on Sundays, and that's my special day for loafing about the stables. In the stables I'm happy and cheerful, but put me in church and I'm a lost man."

Derek still kept up the fiction of Fawnie's illness. Well, she wasn't exactly sick, he said, but she had a delicate chest, couldn't stand the cold. Hobbs was sympathetic. "Your wife is what I call a raving beauty," he said. "As far as women go, just *as* women, well—if a fellow has the nerve—there's a woman for you."

The worst was when Mr. Jerrold brought some jelly to

the door that Grace had made for Fawnie—jelly that enclosed a cluster of California grapes. Derek was miserable. Full of shame he strode up and down the room, eyeing the jelly as it quivered on the dark blue plate. "This will never do, Buckskin," he groaned. "This will have to stop. I've simply got to tell. There's no getting out of it. Buckskin—d'you hear? I've got to tell that you and I are just batching it."

He and Buckskin ate the jelly.

2.

One morning Bill Rain asked Derek to go up to the shack. His father was anxious to see him. Derek found the sick man lying on the floor behind the stove. A quilt was wrapped about him and his stockinged feet projected into the middle of the room.

He had grown terribly emaciated, a bright fever spot burned on either cheek, his hollow eyes sparkled with pain and hatred.

"My old woman and my son don't mind if I die here," he said. "I been tellin' them for weeks to fetch you up to see me. I got to get to the hospital at Yeoland for an operation or I die here. You see that, Mr. Vale. You pay my way and I work for you when I am well—yes—my fingers to the bone—yes—till I fall in my tracks. I'm a strong man, I tell you, no poor rat like that Bill—but this pain's killin' me. Oh, send me to the hospital, Mr. Vale, and I work for you till your farm's the finest in the country. Oh, this awful pain!"

"Don't worry any more," soothed Vale. "I'll send Bill with you today. You'll be all right." Outside he said to Bill sternly: "Why didn't you let me know your father was in this state? I thought he was getting better."

"Well, maw and me kept thinkin' he would git better, but he's worse. He's like a crazy man sometimes. He

keeps his stick beside him and gives us some awful cracks, and yells at the little girls enough to ruin their wits."

"You must take him to the hospital today. He should have gone long ago."

It was arranged that Derek and Lottie should attend to the stock and do the milking for the three days that were required for Bill's journey to Yeoland where the hospital was, and where, nearby, the Rains had some relations.

Derek was glad when the fruit waggon, on the bottom of which Bill had made a bed of straw for his father, passed into the road. He felt that some blame was attached to himself for not having enquired more closely into Rain's condition.

Bill returned on the third day and told how his father had suffered on the journey and was now lying in the hospital awaiting an operation. But he was cheerful, he said, and full of gratitude to his benefactor.

His benefactor! Vale groaned. He who had let him lie and rot all winter.

3.

In a fortnight (it was now late in February) a letter came from Yeoland to the Rains. Lottie and Bill brought it to Vale to read to them. The lamp had just been lighted, and, as he bent forward in the circle of lamplight to read, he was struck by the pathos of the two waiting figures by the door—Bill clutching his cap, Lottie her shawl, attentive, anxious, dark, humble.

Rain was dead all right. The cold, dry letter of the matron said so. They must come at once if they wanted the body. (That poor, lank, huddled body in the cart! it came between Vale and the letter.) He read it aloud, trying somehow to soften it.

Lottie and Bill stared at the floor. "Dear, oh dear," Lottie said softly. Bill said: "Well, paw's dead. I thought

he'd be gittin' well by now." They were silent then, thinking deeply.

"I'm very sorry," said Derek. "What shall you do?"

"I'd like to go over to Yeoland and look after him," replied Lottie. "She said he was dead, did she?" . . . .

The next morning she set out with the three little girls. They were all in black.

"My maw she made them little dresses out of two black skirts a lady gave her," explained Bill proudly. "She sat up all night to do it. I wish paw could see them." He sighed deeply and went about his work.

4.

That day a gale blew from the east. They were in for heavy weather, Bill said. Gulls, in ever increasing numbers, drifted above the foam-splashed waves that hammered on the bluffs like rowdies at a door. Spray dashed against the windows of Grimstone; foam clogged the mouth of the creek like lather.

Happy, wayward, fantastic creatures, the gulls! Exultant, crying, eager, voracious! Buckskin beat his fists on the window and laughed at them. How they swept and rose and fell, this one shooting upward like a flame, that one just kissing the rim of a wave with his breast! Wonderful gulls! Heartless, cruel, merry gulls!

All day there was no sun. Heavy purple clouds were draped like curtains above the green uneasy lake. In the afternoon sleet began to fall. To fall? No. To drive, to hiss, to spit, to cut like a whip! Derek thought his cheeks would bleed before he reached the barn. Coming back, he crooked his arm across his face and ran, his feet crunching in the granulated depth of it. The storm grew worse and worse.

When night came, he was too restless to read. He walked

up and down through the empty rooms, feeling singularly alone in the world. Buckskin, lucky Buckskin, slept. Derek looked at the familiar pictures, at the thin, aloof, china greyhound on the mantel. It was against the greyhound that Jammery's note had been propped. How long ago that seemed. How alone he was!

At last he went to bed. But he could not sleep. The house rocked. The four-poster swayed under him. He had never known such a storm. And, as he lay listening, the confused uproar resolved into definite, terrible episodes.

It seemed that he could hear the clash of two armies, who met with ring of steel and roar of lusty throats, fighting up and down the road. And, mingled with the wild uproar, came the keening of women crouched above their dead. . . . And, ere their wailing ceased, the clamor of a brazen band burst forth. Oh, the deafening discords of the horns! The thunder of the drums! And, in the far distance the women still wailing. But what had come to the clashing armies? There was no more shouting nor hurrahing. Only the stamp and pad of thousands of flying feet. They were madly running. Running! Oh the footsteps! Crunching, padding in the snow. Footsteps everywhere. The women had ceased their keening to listen. The footsteps were coming in at the gate. Hammering on the flagstones. Kicking at the door. They would have the door down yet. Terrifying, deafening uproar.

Now the footsteps were gone. The keening women gone. The bandsmen that had fallen into panic gone. Only a deep-toned humming of some far-off organ remained, singing through the hissing sleet, filling the night with melody.

To this accompaniment it seemed that the Spirit of the lake rose out of the foam, strode up the cliff, and then before the homely stone house did battle with the Spirit of Grimstone for possession of the land. Derek pictured the

Spirit of the lake—long-armed, with streaming hair and blazing eyes; the Spirit of Grimstone—massive, brown, earthy. They laughed and shouted on the cliffs, half in rage, half in ferocious play. Derek laughed to hear them fighting for the land while he lay snug in bed. And Buckskin, in his sleep, laughed too.

5.

Derek did not realize that he had slept, and yet, there was the ruddy sunrise staining the wall and he had never seen the dawn. Where was the wind now? Utter silence and piercing cold. When he raised his head the breath from his nostrils made a little cloud above the quilt. The window was completely covered by downy frost flushed pink by the sun. Sharp cracking sounds came from the old house. He jumped out of bed. His boots which he had taken off wet the night before were frozen to the floor. He jerked them up and pulled them on. Lord, how cold they were! Hurriedly he got into his clothes, put the boy into his three little garments (what a blue bit of a nose!) and carried him to the kitchen. Here the coal fire still burned and one did not feel quite so frozen. He fastened Buckskin into his high chair and made the porridge. While it cooked he went outside, to see what sort of world the storm had left behind.

It was as though a curtain had risen to show him some strange stage scene set in the polar region. No wonder his brain had been filled with wild fancies last night. The storm had done its damnedest, and left behind this white, silent, sinister passivity—all its passion frozen into a glittering picture for remembrance.

The lake was a seething cauldron. From its rocking waves rose endless spirals and columns of vapour, twisting, writhing together, struck into a thousand radiant tints by

the shafts of the sun. The red sun itself mounted with speed into the melting glories of the sky, like a fiery ball hurled upward from below by giants at play.

The lashing and freezing of the spray had formed for a quarter of a mile from the shore hundreds of hummocks from five to twenty feet high of matchless purity, blue white in the shadow.

Derek was exhilarated, excited, by the splendour of the scene. After he had given Bill a hand with the work, he set out to explore this new polar region at his door. He went down the road and crossed the bridge where icicles jutted out horizontally from the framework like frozen fingers pointing to Grimstone. He wandered among the hummocks out to the water's edge, winding his way in and out, staring down into ragged caverns where the black water pressed and sucked.

"I might be the only soul on earth," he thought; and then he saw that he was not alone, for a figure had suddenly risen on one of the highest peaks and stood there like a statue gazing outward over the lake.

It was Grace Jerrold.

A flood of emotion shook him. To meet her alone like this! As though it were at the world's end. He and she. He slid and scrambled down his hummock and started towards her. She heard him coming and turned her head, but she remained on the peak of the hummock looking down at him unsmilingly.

"Shall I come up?" he asked when he had reached the bottom of the slope.

She shook her head but did not speak.

"Not come up? Grace. Have I done something new?"

"Oh, no. But"—she paused as though she could not go on.

"But what?"

"It is not good for us—for me—I mean, to be here together. I feel too much. Why should I pretend otherwise?"

"I say, Grace, don't pretend with me. Be yourself—your darling self! We love each other. Well, can't we face that love together—even cherish it, a little, on a morning like this?"

Her fair face flushed, her eyes became a deeper blue as she answered, "Face it, perhaps, but not cherish it."

He moved a step closer and then said, with a tragic flourish of his hand towards Grimstone: "Do you see that house, Grace? A lonely looking house, eh! Well, I live alone there—except for the baby. Fawnie left me over two months ago."

She uttered a low cry and held out her hands. "Oh! Derek. I'm coming down, catch me!" She slipped and ran down the sloping side of the hummock, and when his arms had caught her and supported her she said again: "Poor, poor Derek! But why did she leave you?"

"She ran away with Jammery."

"With Jammery. An Indian! How horrible!"

"Not to her."

"But—after you."

"Apparently I didn't satisfy her." He still held her arm, and they began slowly to follow an icy path among the hummocks.

"Are you cold, dearest?" he asked. She shook her head, and said, "I'm all bundled in fur, don't you see?"

He saw indeed the etherealised beauty of her face in the brilliant light. He became aware that she wore a grey squirrel coat and a little grey squirrel toque with a knot of red berries on the brim.

"You are so utterly adorable," he said, "that I never know what you wear. I am only conscious of your near-

ness and dearness. Now don't be angry, please." He could not help it. He slipped his hand into her muff beside hers, and his fingers closed about her slender wrist.

"I'm not angry," she said, pretending not to notice his hand in the muff. "That is what makes you such a dangerous sort of man. A woman cannot be angry with you for more than a few moments. I think it's those boyish appealing eyes, and something about your mouth. But it's really terrible. One feels angry and then, in a flash the tables are turned and one is sorry, feels oneself cruel, and condones. Really, I think that is a dangerous sort of man, don't you?"

"Not a bit. Just a poor blundering idiot, floundering from one morass into another. Never meaning any real harm—upon my soul, Gay, no real harm, even at my worst. But I've actually no strength of character, I think—I've time to think these days—I know Edmund thinks so, too. He's as much as said so."

"Edmund!" Her tone said, How dare Edmund judge Derek! "What does Edmund know of trouble?"

"Nothing at all. He doesn't want to know anything, so he keeps out of it."

They had walked along a level plateau of ice and from it mounted a hummock that overhung the water. Down the glassy curve of it they watched the crashing of the malachite waves, now impotent to destroy what they had so recently created.

"You know," Derek went on, "the only decent thing about me is that I'm faithful. I mean—oh, Lord, I never can express myself—I mean that when any person—or thing—belongs to me once—once I possess it and care for it—it's always mine. Nothing can change that. For instance, there's a bit of you that's mine—that you gave me that morning in the stable—nothing can take that from me.

I'll cherish it always. And look here"—his face reddened. "There's Fawnie, too. Only so different. I wish I could explain. But I was thinking once about a flower—a sort of lily thing that comes up in the stream in August, by the bridge there. Its roots are in the mud, its stalk and leaves in the dark water, but its flower opens in the pure air, and turns to the sun and breeze. Well, that's like my love for you. It's the flower of me. The bloom. All that's best in me rushes up to it, and still my roots are in the soil and my stalk and leaves in the dark. What a comparison!" He laughed with a tremor in his voice.

"I understand, and it makes me very happy," said Grace, and her eyes met his with a look of ardent resignation.

Reckless, passionate words came rushing to his lips. He thought: "For heaven's sake, exert some self-control now . . . . show that strength of character you're always howling about. Don't kiss her!" And, even as he was thinking, he put his arms about her, and held her to his breast. So they kissed hopelessly, longingly, and yet with joy under the compassionate splendour of the sky.

Afterward they stood quietly, two lonely figures, her head resting on his shoulder, his lips against the bright, winglike sweep of her hair, and she said, half-laughing, half-crying, "Oh, you poor darling, you need me so!"

"If only I could have you for my very own," he cried. "If only I could!"

CHAPTER XII

Buckskin Strikes His Tent

1.

It may have been standing about on the ice so long that gave Derek a cold (he wandered there an hour or more after Grace had left him) but, whatever it was, the cold appeared, manifesting itself in flashes of heat and chills, and, worst of all, a toothache. He did not sleep much all night because of the toothache, and when morning came his one thought was to be rid of the tooth.

He did not like leaving Buckskin for so long, but he had a way of barricading him with chairs on the couch in the dining room that had answered very well when he had gone to visit Hobbs. After breakfast he imprisoned him thus, gave him Pegleg to play with, a bottle of milk and two biscuits for refreshment, and left Jock on the foot of the couch for company.

The ride to Brancepeth made him feel better, the invigorating air, the light rise and fall in the stirrups, the feel of the well-groomed horse beneath him.

By the time he was sitting in the waiting-room of the dentist's office the tooth was not aching at all, nevertheless he was determined to have it out.

There was a patient in the chair, so he was obliged to wait. He felt nervous about Buckskin. He stared through the dingy window at the shops across the way. There was the milliner's where Fawnie had come out on the step to show him the new hat. Fawnie. She should be at home now minding Buckskin—the baggage!

He picked up one of the women's magazines that littered the table and began to read. It was an article on Better Babies. As he read his fair boyish forehead was puckered into worried knots. He had never dreamed that babies needed so much attention. Why, Great Scott, if he did everything for Buckskin that was advised, nay, commanded, here, he should have time for nothing else! What the devil was this about orange juice at ten every morning? Buckskin ate pulp and all at any old hour. What was this about coddled eggs and grated carrots? And a thermometer in the bath? The book made him sick. Buckskin wasn't that kind of baby. He was a healthy little animal that needed no pampering. Hold on—Weight at ten months—Dangers of overweight—Buckskin was five pounds overweight! Well, well. He had known he was a whopper. How that tooth was howling now!

The dentist came to the door, smiling, and beckoned him with his head. He was a twinkling young man who looked as though doing things to teeth was the most cheery profession on earth.

"Open, please," he said, and twinkled into Derek's mouth. "Now which tooth?"

"Widdom toot," said Derek, as well as he could, through the dentist's fingers.

"Wisdom tooth, yes. A cavity that should have been attended to some time ago. But we can soon fix that. It needs treating."

"Pull it out," said Derek. "I've no time for treatments."

"Very well," agreed the dentist, still twinkling. "Gas or freezing?"

"Oh—freeze it. . . . ."

It was out. What a beastly grating noise the forceps made! The dentist was all twinkles as he held it up, gory-rooted, for Derek to see.

Derek felt immensely relieved to be back in the street without it. He went to The Duke of York and had a little whiskey neat.

His cold was worse, a cough was developing, yet he would not set out for home till he had bought the boy a new pair of shoes. Shiny patent leather strap slippers he got with little buckles. He pictured Buckskin's kicks and crows of delight when they were put on him.

He was really getting anxious about Buckskin. Suppose he fell off the couch someway and got to the fire! Or Jock might get rough with him. Jock wouldn't actually *hurt* him, but he might get a bit rough. He covered the last two miles at a gallop.

He gave his horse to Bill at the barn and hurried to the house. "Buckskin!" he called, as he unlocked the kitchen door and stamped the snow off his feet. "Hello, Buck!"

Jock came to him through the pantry crawling on his belly.

What was wrong? For God's sake what was wrong? Buckskin! Buck!

He was lying, wedged, between the row of chairs and the couch. He was writhing—twisting. The whites of his eyes showed through the half-closed lids, his lips were blue.

Derek snatched him up and shook him. Buckskin! Waken up! Thank God, there came a flicker of those white eyelids!

Oh, for a woman! Any woman! Lottie Rain. . . . Miles away. . . . Mrs. Chard. He laid the child on the pillow and ran wildly through the house. He crashed through the dry currant and gooseberry bushes. Bang! bang! at Chard's back door! Mrs. Chard opened, her arms white with flour, flour on her nose, fright in her eyes.

"Whatever is the matter?" she asked.

"My boy—my little chap—dying!"

She began to wipe the flour off her arms. "What is the matter? What does he act like?"

Oh, the incredible coolness and slowness of the woman! "Oh, Mrs. Chard, he's stiff and blue—he's perhaps dead by now. He looked awful."

Mrs. Chard turned to her stove. She lifted the lid off the teakettle and looked in. "Full," she said, "and boiling. It sounds like convulsions. Just you bring this along, Mr. Vale. Children, be good while I'm gone." She shut the door and followed Derek heavily through the yard.

He showed her where the child was lying, but he could not bear to go into the room with her because of what he might see. He felt more afraid than he had ever felt in his life before, a new, sick, helpless sort of fear. Buckskin was so little, so young.

After a moment she came to the door. "Fill his bath," she said. "Make the water as hot as you can bear your hand in. I'll strip him. He'll be all right, I think."

Glad to do something, Derek got the little green tin bath, filled it, and tested the water with a shaking hand. Mrs. Chard came out carrying the baby. Derek turned away. He could not look.

Ages of misery passed. Mrs. Chard was speaking: "Now, what a good little boy. My, my, what a good little boy. Look around, Mr. Vale."

He turned. Buckskin lay in the bath, his body, steaming, scarlet, supported by her hand, his face bewildered but—thank God!—natural. He looked at Mrs. Chard, he looked at Derek, then he smiled, pushing forward his lower teeth and wrinkling his nose in a funny way he had.

Derek went to him. "Is he all right?" he asked. "Shall I get a doctor?"

"I wouldn't now. You might ask the doctor to advise you about him, but just now he's all right. One of mine

had two convulsions, but he got over them and he's the healthiest of all now. This is an awful fine child."

She had taken him from the bath, laid him on her broad lap, and, with a practised hand, was drying him. Derek looked down at her with almost overwhelming gratitude. At the moment he really loved her for what she had done. Her sad heavy face, her large bosom, her thick round shoulders were admirable, because they were the essence of brooding motherhood.

When she rose to go he saw that she was with child and his heart smote him for having been so excitable with her, and for having almost dragged her from her house to his.

"How can I ever repay you?" he asked, when she had Buckskin comfortably tucked up on the couch with Pegleg clasped to his breast.

"Don't worry about that," she said. "I s'pose his mother was badly frightened, eh?"

"His mother! Oh—she's away," Derek stammered, his face scarlet. "She's gone to Brancepeth for the day, shopping. I was here alone with him."

"No wonder you were scared," said Mrs. Chard, kindly.

2.

Buckskin slept well that night and awakened Derek as usual by clasping his head in his fat little arms and kissing him rapturously. To get his jumping, naked little body into his clothes was a task that took all Derek's newly acquired skill. At breakfast he beat the table with his porridge spoon, and broke into trills of laughter over nothing.

"It's all very well," said Derek to him, seriously. "I like to see you in high spirits, old man, but have a thought for your poor dad. Yesterday you changed him from a hardy young man into a doddering old imbecile by your eccentricities. Don't do it again."

"Gug-gug! Did-dy, dad-dy!" replied his son, winking

at him between his curling pink fingers, and getting porridge on his hair.

Derek thought: "I believe I'll buy some of those women's magazines. A fellow might get some pointers from them after all."

He had determined that he would see Mrs. Machin that day, tell her that he and the boy were alone, and beg her to come back and keep house for them. Surely no woman with a heart in her body could refuse him when he told her of yesterday's fright.

He had Bill bring the red sleigh to the door. When Buckskin heard the bells jingling and saw Derek fetching his rabbit skin coat and cap with the earlugs, he could hardly contain himself for joy. He kicked his heels and shouted. He showed all his pearl-like teeth, and Jock, to add to the gaiety, leaped to the couch, put his nose to the window-pane and gave forth a volley of short, mad barks.

Mrs. Machin came out of her sister's cottage near the lighthouse and stood with folded arms, on the doorstep, listening to Derek's recital. She did not look at Derek while he talked, but stared out over the scene familiar since her birth. The pier was thronged with gulls, resting quietly with folded wings in the February sunlight. Sometimes one rose and sailed aloft, his cries mingling with the constant whining of the reels. A smell of fish and wood fires ascended from the fishing huts on the shore.

"Well," said Mrs. Machin, when he had finished, "it's just about what I had expected. That rat Jammery, eh? I could have told you so. D'ye mind the time I sat up two whole nights to keep her in the room where you'd put her? But she was one of the kind that wouldn't stay put no matter what you'd do."

"Mrs. Machin, are you coming back to me?"

She looked at him ruminatively now out of her pale

oyster-coloured eyes. "Well, I won't say I will and I won't say I won't. It partly depends on my sister. She's been on her deathbed now for six weeks and seems in no hurry to be off, but when she does go you may see me at Grimstone any day."

"I had hoped you might come right away but, of course, under the circumstances——"

"Well, you'll know I'm comin' when you see me. And you take good care of that baby. He's a beauty and no mistake. The image of you, only a little darker in the skin. And I wouldn't worry too much about them fits. Fits is fits, and if they're in you they're bound to come out, the same as boils. He may never have another. I'm more concerned about that cough of yours. It's an awful cough. However did you get it?"

"I was up and down with a toothache night before last. The room was cold. Then yesterday I had it out. Took a chill, somehow, and I couldn't sleep last night."

"Well, well, you have had a time," sympathized Mrs. Machin. "Now, look here, Mr. Vale, I've got something that'll fix that cold of yours up in no time. It cured me of bronchitis and asamay when no doctor living could. It's a mixture that I make up myself and the secret of it was told to me over fifty years ago. You just wait and I'll fetch you a bottle of it."

When she had gone into the house Buckskin rolled his eyes up at Derek with the drollest laughter in them as though to say—"Rum old party, eh?"

"Rather," agreed Derek, "but you'll do well to keep on the right side of her."

When Mrs. Machin had brought the bottle she made him take out the cork and swallow a mouthful of the mixture on the spot. "It's awfully queer," he said tasting. "What is it made from?"

Mrs. Machin gave a delighted smile, "I'll tell you," she said. "Though there's very few I would tell. But I can't live forever, and some time you might want the mixture when I'm dead and gone." In a lowered voice she added with a triumphant grin, "It's a wasps' nest."

"A wasps' nest," he repeatedly blankly. "What do you mean by a wasps' nest?"

"Just what I say, a boiled wasps' nest."

He was somewhat aghast. "Mrs. Machin, was that dose actually made out of a wasps' nest?"

"It was. You get the nest when the wasps are settled down for the winter. You boil it three hours with plenty of sugar and a little rum, and then strain and bottle it. There's nothing in the nature of a cough it won't cure."

"Most remarkable," said Vale, "I'd never heard of such a thing."

"Well, I s'pose there's a few things you haven't heard of." Her tone was tart. "You never heard anything *agin* wasps' nests, have you?"

"No-o. Were there many wasps in the nest when you boiled it?"

"I don't know. I wasn't directed to look in the nest and I didn't look in. I always follow directions carefully. If more people would follow directions there'd be fewer mistakes made. Better take another sip before you go."

He meekly took another.

"Bah-bah—" said Buckskin, reaching up towards the bottle.

"Bless his heart," said Mrs. Machin, her pale lips relaxing into a smile, "he wants some. And a little taste would do him good, too. Whose pretty boy are you, eh? Whose pretty boy are you?" She shook her head at him and laughed.

3.

Derek was now afraid to leave Buckskin alone. His cold was so bad that he kept to the house almost continually, but when he did go to the barn or the stables he would carry the child on his arm. In fact, the child was seldom out of his thoughts. He would light a candle in the night and hold it near the little sleeping face, to assure himself that those terrible contortions had not again disfigured it. Word came from Yeoland that Lottie's children were ill of the measles, so he could not look for her for several weeks.

To make matters worse, he had trouble with his sheep and cattle, which had fallen sick from eating mouldy silage. If he had been about as usual he would have prevented its being fed to them. But Bill Rain thought that whatever animals could be made to eat was good for them. His own taste in food was peculiar. He begged from Derek all the left-over bacon rinds. These he frizzled in a pan till they were crisp and hard. He carried them in his pocket and produced them at all hours to crunch between his black broken teeth. "Say, Mr. Vale," he would affirm, "I've got the strongest teeth in the country, exceptin' just my uncle John Blackbird. He can lift a chair in his." And he would take another mouthful of rind.

So he thought nothing of feeding mouldy silage to the stock. The silage had been ensiled in a dry, rather ripe condition and was woody and loose, perhaps because it had not been tramped or settled solid. It moulded badly, and two sheep died, and several cows were very sick. Derek had the veterinary, but he was glad when Hobbs appeared one day hopping on a crutch, and ready, as always, to give advice.

Hobbs carried a bunch of daffodils from the Durras greenhouse for Mrs. Vale. He looked downcast when Derek

said she was still ailing. After a pause he asked whether he had ever offended Mrs. Vale. He believed she was avoiding him. Good Lord, no, Derek assured him, she was simply languid, lay down a great deal. He believed the winter had been hard on her. He placed the daffodils in a vase and they stood on the table, golden and arrogant between the two men.

Since he had been so much alone with Derek, Buckskin had grown very shy. He screamed and kicked when Hobbs picked him up, and even the proffering of Hobbs's big gold watch would not tempt him. But when Hobbs took a daffodil from the vase and held it towards him, he did a wonderful thing. He left Derek's knees, between which he had braced himself, and ran to Hobbs. They were his first steps unaided by his father. Derek was red with pride. Hobbs was jubilant. When Buckskin found out what he could do, he did it again and again, toddling, head down, from Derek's knee to Hobbs. Mouldy silage, dead sheep, sick cows were clean forgotten while they watched the splendid staggering of the boy.

"Well, well," said Hobbs. "It beats all. Most cock-a-hoop little rascal. Eleven months, did you say?"

"Yes," replied Derek. "His birthday's in April. I don't want to seem a fool about him, Hobbs, but he really is a rip, isn't he?"

To Derek it seemed that there would be no end to this strange secluded winter that enveloped him like a fog, a fog through which the memory of that morning on the hummocks shot like a flame. But he sought no further meetings. What was the use? Better cling to the remembrance of those terribly sweet moments and forget the rest, if one could. Not seek to add to their sweetness, lest the fruit of the flower should be bitter.

He would sit before the fire in the evenings seeing in the

flames the faces of the two women, Grace and Fawnie. It was amazing how distinct they were—the delicate aquiline of Grace's profile, the disdainful yet tender arch of her mouth—the glow of health beneath Fawnie's dusky skin, the rich convolutions of her hair, her deep, mirthful eyes.

He would stare and stare till he could bear it no longer, then he would snatch up Buckskin from the floor, and pace the room with him, singing loudly some college song that he had never thought to sing again. Sometimes he would recite bits of things he had learned as a youth. Not so long ago, and yet what had happened since then! Buckskin would listen as though he understood every word. His favourite was the song from Hippolytus. When Derek would declaim in his rich, full voice:

> " 'O take me to the mountain O,
> Past the great pines and through the wood,
> Up where the lean hounds softly go,
> A whine for wild thing's blood,
> And madly flies the dappled roe.
> O God, to shout and speed them there
> An arrow by my chestnut hair
> Drawn tight, and one keen glistening spear—
> Ah, if I could!' "

Buckskin could not restrain his rapture. He would shout at the top of his lungs and thump Derek on the chest.

"It's all very well to be enthusiastic," Derek would admonish, "but you ought to restrain yourself to the end of the piece. You nearly drowned me out."

4.

One moist evening, the first of April, when the heavy air was fragrant with the essence of spring, Vale saw the figure of a man standing with bent head, just inside the gate, beneath the tallest walnut tree. He stood so motionless and

so long that Vale's curiosity was aroused and he strolled out to him. It was Newbigging. Even in that dim light he could see that the Scot looked thin and weather-beaten and that his clothes were ragged.

"Newbigging," he exclaimed. "Is it you?"

"Ay, sir, it is. What's left o' me. I've had a haird time since I left here last spring. I got what I wanted and that was the sea. I've had enough o' that to last me the rest of my life. I've been to China and back, two trips, and now I was juist standin' here trying to mak' up ma mind to go in and ask ye if ye'll no take me back." He looked up into Derek's eyes, shamefaced, yet unrepentant.

Derek was eager to take him back, yet he showed some proper reluctance. "If I do, Newbigging, you'll probably take it into that wild head of yours to flit just when I need you most."

"Never," declared Newbigging, emphatically. "I juist want to bide here on the fairm. Yon lake is sea enough for me."

"Come along," said Derek, and took him into the house. Briefly he explained the situation. He was keeping bachelor's hall; Mrs. Vale was away on a visit. He said this last, looking steadily into the eyes of Newbigging who nodded solemnly. Derek believed he understood.

But it was good to have a friendly soul in the house once more! Newbigging settled down without ado. Lass of all work, he named himself. And he set about getting the tea, and washing up the stacks of dirty dishes in the kitchen. He had no tin box to carry upstairs, all his clothes were on his back; but he took the little pasteboard box that held his gilt studs, and the little red book of Scottish songs from his breast pocket, and laid them in the dresser drawer where they had been wont to lie. He carried a hot dish of

ham and eggs in to Derek and ate his own meal from his knee as he dried his feet in the oven.

Buckskin made friends with him at once and toddled back and forth between dining room and kitchen, carrying Pegleg to be kissed by Newbigging and Derek alternately.

"Ah, he's a bonnie wee boy," said the Scot admiringly. "He'll mak' a son to be proud of. But keep him away from the sea, Mr. Vale. It mak's a bad son, and a bad husband, too."

"I've been awfully worried about him," said Vale, seriously. "He's had a convulsion—a terrible one."

"Did ye see a doctor?"

"Yes. I asked Mrs. Machin about it first. She didn't think it serious. Then I saw Dr. Bosomworth. I thought perhaps I was feeding him wrong. But the doctor said his diet was very good. Said it might be hereditary."

"Never worry, sir. I had three fits in one afternoon when I was six years old and I've not had the sign of one since."

"Were there no bad effects?"

"Weel, whin I come out o' the third one I says, 'I'll gang tae sea,' and that was the beginning o't."

"Come along in," said Derek, "and I'll get a bottle of whiskey from the cupboard. I haven't had anyone to talk and drink with in the evening for a long time."

Newbigging sat down by the table with some diffidence, but his blue eyes glistened when Derek set the bottle before him and told him to pour what he wanted. He half-filled his glass, added some soda water, and then raised it in the direction of the sofa where Buckskin slept.

"The bairn," he said. "Long life to him."

"Buckskin," said Derek, and they drank.

"I wager," said Newbigging, after he had wiped his lips

with the back of his hand, "that ye'd never guess who I met out West in the Saskatchewan."

"Not Phœbe and Hugh?"

"The very pair. The train I was on was crawlin' over the dismal, flat prairie, and every time we stopped at a station, I mairvelled tae see the pale, weary-lookin' folk on the platform. Grey, and dour, and old before their time, wi' never a rosy cheek or full red lips among them. Presently, at one of the stops, the door of the coach was flung open and a young woman followed by a man came in. Her airms were full of paircels, and when she boarded the train she tripped on the step and plunged intil the coach, head down, her bundles flyin' in all directions. I jumped up to help her, and she gied me a shamefaced look I saw that it was Phœbe, rosy as ever, wi' her neck like a bowl o' new milk. . . . Man, they were glad tae see me. And they asked kindly after you, Mr. Vale."

"Had they a good situation?"

"Fine. Keepin' hoose for a wealthy rancher. They were shoppin' for him that day. They wanted me tae come back wi' them, and get a job but I slapped ma bonnet on ma heid and said, 'Nae prairie for me, I'm gaein' back tae old Grimstone."

"I'm glad you came," said Derek. "Help yourself."

"D'ye mind, Mr. Vale," said the Scot, when he had drunk another glass, "how Hughie used tae say in lambing time —'we'll be haein' a new wee lamb afore the morn'?"

"I'll never forget that."

Newbigging chuckled. "I think he'd been safe in repeatin' that saying, tae judge by the appearance of Phœbe."

"Tck," muttered Derek. "What would the rancher say to that?"

"Weel," replied Newbigging, "they didna seem to be worryin'."

"Speaking of babies," said Derek, "I must put that little fellow to bed."

He carried the child to his bedroom and laid him snugly in the old four-poster. He buried his face for a moment against the little neck, inhaling the delicious sweetness of the warm, tender flesh. Then he drew the covers close, lowered the light, and returned to Newbigging.

He was sitting with his fair head thrown back against the high back of the chair, his blue sailor's eyes fixed unwinkingly on the light.

"I've been thinking o' some of my adventures in China," he said, solemnly. "I'd like tae tell ye aboot them, sir, if ye'll listen."

Derek asquiesced and sat down again. It was plain that Newbigging had drunk a good deal. He launched into stories of his doings in the East, which Derek did not believe but which he found very entertaining, for the Scot had a vigourous flow of words, and his changeful face was a pleasure to watch. Derek had not drunk to excess since those summer nights when he had gambled with his Indian relations at the shack. But now in the warmth of Newbigging's presence (he had not known how lonely he was) he grew once more indiscreet.

They exchanged reminiscences of boyhood. Newbigging told of fights in Scotland—even to his first real fight when as he lay on his opponent panting, the other urchins crowded close, yelling, "Mak' him greet, Jimmie, mak' him greet!" and, man, he had made him greet!

At last Derek told Newbigging of how, when a small boy in Nova Scotia, he had squeezed his body between the horizontal bars of an old farmer's orchard gate, and had filled his blouse with ripe red apples. The farmer had given chase. Derek had had a good start but when he had attempted to get through the gate, the bulk of the apples

in his blouse had made him too wide, and wriggle as he would he could not escape. When Derek told this story, Newbigging laughed. They both laughed uproariously. After another drink Derek drew his chair closer and told the story again with more detail. This time Newbigging looked very grave, and they stared at each other in sorrowful silence. Still another drink. Derek repeated the story. "Picture me, Newbigging," he ended, his voice shaking a little, "a poor, miserable little fella, c-caught there, between those bars, the apples on my tummy, and f-farmer at my back!"

Newbigging reached across the table and held out his hand. Derek took and retained it. Then they both sang together in voices mellow with feeling—

"And here's a hand, my trusty fiere,
And gie's a hand o' thine;
And we'll tak' a right guid willie-waught
For auld lang syne."

5.

Derek did not awaken until the bright spring sunshine had flooded the room. He heard the familiar liquid calling of the hen turkeys and the thunderous note of the gobbler. He heard the hiss and scrape of his tail feathers as they were unfurled.

He scarcely remembered how he had got to bed the night before, but there were his clothes neatly hung on their stretchers. He remembered seeing Newbigging disappear up the stair in his stockinged feet, the candle in his hand dripping wax over the steps, and there had been singing. Wonderful soul-stirring singing. . . .

It was a wonder Buckskin was not up and doing. Playing peek-a-boo under the sheet or trying to put his toe in his mouth. He turned over to look at him. Buckskin lay

facing him. He looked, and a horrible shudder shook him. He looked again. But surely this was not Buck! This cold, set little mask of a face, with the look of angry surprise in the open eyes and on the compressed mouth, as though bitterly indeed he resented this outrageous jest that Fate had played on him. And that rigid body—those clenched hands—Buckskin, oh Buck!

Derek sprang from the bed. He ran to the foot of the stairs and shouted for Newbigging. Newbigging came headlong from his sleep.

"For God's sake what is it, sir?"

"The boy—the boy—he's dead!"

"Dead. How can that be? What killed him?"

"That same thing, I suppose. Come down! Come down!"

Newbigging came running.

Derek stood, sick and bewildered, in the passage while Newbigging was in the room. When he came out his step was heavy.

"You're richt enough, sir. The puir laddie's gone. Gone these hours past."

He took Derek by the arm and led him to the dining room. He gave him something to drink—something that burned his throat.

"Just sit here quietly a bit," said Newbigging.

Derek sat down in the armchair before the black hearth. He did not speak. He clasped his hands between his knees, and twisted and turned in his chair. His face was contorted with agony. He had not known that one could suffer so. Jock came and timidly licked his clinched hands. Buckskin, oh Buck!

After a while Newbigging said: "I think I should go for the doctor, Mr. Vale. It's customary."

"I won't stay here alone," said Derek, with a wild look

towards that room. "You go and harness the mare, and I'll get Bill."

He left the house and went through the orchard. Moisture from the bare limbs dripped on his head. He knocked at the door of the shack, a heavy, resounding knock. Bill appeared in the door, frightened, hollow-cheeked; an insufferable heat and stuffiness came from within.

"Go for the doctor," said Derek, shortly. "The little boy is dead."

Back through the orchard, under the drip of the quickening trees, back in the house.

Once more in the chair before the hearth, twisting his hands together. Buckskin, oh, Buck!

The doctor came. He was a nice fellow, sympathetic. He was terribly sorry. He was the coroner, too. He gave Derek the certificate of natural death and a permit to bury the child at Grimstone. Derek would not have him put in that desolate little graveyard where Solomon Sharroe lay. He wanted him near him.

Hobbs came. Amazingly sympathetic. Tears in his eyes. He brought a bunch of daffodils to lay on the little coffin. You could have knocked him down with a feather when he heard it. Would he let the Jerrolds know? They might not hear until after—No, no, for God's sake, no. All he wanted was to be left alone.

Mrs. Machin came. She had buried her sister two days before and was now ready to take up the reins at Grimstone. She bathed the child and prepared him for burial. A little coffin was brought from Brancepeth.

After the lamps were lighted Mrs. Machin and Newbigging sat together in the kitchen. The sailor's tongue was running, doubtless about his adventures in China. Derek now sat in state alone. He had not looked at the newspaper that day, so he got it and spread it out on the table

before him. Mechanically he turned to the column of Horses for Sale. That always interested him. He read, muttering the words half aloud:

FOR SALE—"SILKEN-MAID"—
Beautiful breedy-looking upstanding standard-bred trotting mare; her sire "Silk-Tassel" dam "Belle Roland"; age six years; sound: 15.3 hands; weight eleven hundred; good free active road mare; road all day twelve miles an hour; best feet and legs; well boned, level-headed, square-gaited trotter.

Good Lord, he did not know what he had been reading. . . . What was it all about? His eyes, raised stupidly from the paper, rested on the collection of butterflies that now stood on the mantelpiece. How the little chap had loved them! Derek had tried to teach him the names of the different species, and he had made sounds that were really good attempts, and had always leaned forward lovingly to pat the glass above that bright blue one from the Hartz Mountains, with his soft little palm. The little hands—the little hands!

Derek pushed back his chair and rose from the table. He went into the parlour. Mrs. Machin had lighted candles in the tall silver candelabrum there, to look "pretty"—not because she held with "any popish notions." The candles threw a seemly light over the little folded hands (he held one of Hobbs's daffodils) and over the little face—not startled and resentful now, but wearing a look of sweet composure.

Derek placed one hand on the foot of the coffin and the other on the head. Supported thus, he bent forward till his lips touched the lips of that darling child of his transgression. Sobs tore at his throat. "Buckskin, oh Buck, my little boy!"

6.

Spring had come in the night. The world was full of joy. Ingratiating odours stole up from meadow and field. Forth from the lake leaped the hot bright sun and strode like a giant to his work. Sweet, hostile strains of rival birds rose upward to the sky. Everywhere, everywhere, the striving, shooting, leaping, singing upward; but for Buckskin the lying down in the dark earth beneath the walnut trees, the clasping of little hands, the shutting of gay, deep eyes, the folding of bright wings scarcely spread.

It was only six o'clock when Derek crossed the lawn to the green plot behind the apple-house where he had told Newbigging to dig the grave. He had chosen this spot because he had often thought that winter what a nice place it would be for the little chap to play on next summer. The grass here seemed especially fine; and it was starred in May by little blue-eyed flowers, and here the birds liked to hop about and sing. Then the smell of apples that came through the latticed window of the apple-house was sweet, very sweet.

Newbigging was not quite ready yet. He was digging so energetically that some of the loose soil flew against the sloping, moss-grown roof of the apple-house, and from there scattered to the ground. He looked up and wiped his brow.

"The ground's still haird," he said. "But I took all the sod off nicely and it can be laid back without a break."

"I'm glad of that," said Derek.

He watched Newbigging till the grave was ready, then he said, "Come. I want to get this over before anyone is about."

They returned to the house.

Mrs. Machin was waiting in the parlour. In her black bonnet and cape she was prepared to follow in decency to

the grave, though she thought it heathenish that the child should not be laid in consecrated ground.

Nor would Derek have Mr. Ramsey sent for to read the burial service. The conception of Buckskin had been secret; their life together that winter had been secret; now, in death, let him strike his tent in secret and join his dark forbears without benefit of clergy.

But Derek took his uncle's large prayer-book from the bookcase and carried it to the graveside. Newbigging and he bore the light coffin between them. Mrs. Machin followed. A strange funeral procession. Their slow passage over the moist turf, was watched by heavy gulls swinging above in the warm April wind. The chime of the waves on the shore was Buckskin's knell.

In a low voice, but steady, Derek read the burial service, his head bent over the book, the wind tossing his fair hair. Newbigging stood with folded arms and legs apart, his tanned neck rising like a column out of his blue sailor's jersey. Mrs. Machin's face was set as she stared sorrowfully into the grave. The feather on her black bonnet kept up a nervous quivering.

"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out"—read Derek (not even Pegleg, he thought, lying discarded on the floor.) "The Lord gave (He gave this kind, too!) and the Lord hath taken away; (He took this kind to Himself, also) blessed be the name of the Lord."

The wind freshened; the chiming of the waves grew sweeter; the gulls swung above their heads. Derek read on: "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, (a year, this man!) and is full of misery (misery? Oh, those mirthful, laughing eyes of his!). He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; (like a flower! Derek's voice

broke,) he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."

With a motion of the head, he signalled Newbigging to begin filling in the grave. As the earth was cast upon the lid of the coffin only broken phrases were audible—"to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed"—"dust to dust"—"according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." The mighty working! He could read no more, but stood motionless and silent as Newbigging finished his work.

Unconsciously his eyes followed the movements of a woman whose figure was outlined against the sky as she slowly made her way along the undulations of the bluffs. Slowly she descended the steep and came to the bridge. She stood leaning over the rail a moment looking down into the tumbling stream below, before she proceeded. Her progression was heavy as though she were tired or weak, but still she drew nearer and nearer.

Newbigging was laying the green sod in place as she turned in at the gate. He sat up on his heels and stared at the approaching figure, then he raised his startled eyes to Derek's face. Mrs. Machin after one long bitter look turned and walked back to the house.

Jock crawled to the end of the chain by which he had been fastened to a tree and lifted his lip in deprecating welcome. Fawnie went to the two men and stood between them looking down at the grave.

"What little grave is this?" she asked slowly, with a catch in her voice.

"It's the wee lad's," replied Newbigging. "He died yesterday." He went on carefully replacing the sod.

Fawnie watched in silence a space as though fascinated by the movements of his hands. Then she said, "Couldn't

you uncover him and let me see his face, jus' for a minute, please, Durek?"

"No," answered Derek, coldly. "You deserted him when he was well. You shall not disturb him now."

She drew a deep sigh. "It's pretty hard," she said, "never to see my little baby's face again."

"I suppose it is," said Derek, without looking at her, "but it's not to be." He went to Jock who was whining, unloosed him, and went into the house.

He hesitated a moment in the dining room, and then entered the dim, cool parlour. He replaced the chairs that had been taken from their customary positions to support the coffin, and then sat down on the sofa staring blankly at the shuttered windows.

He thought—"What a stupid, sullen chap I am getting. Nothing surprises me. There is Fawnie come back, and it seems perfectly natural. There is Buck—dead—and she standing by his grave and—I'm not surprised. Well—well—well—well."

He repeated the monosyllable aloud, his mouth twisted with a pained expression. He took his pipe from his pocket, looked at it, turned it over in his hand, and returned it to his pocket.

Though Buckskin was in his grave, Derek's heart would not let him be. Painfully he went over in his mind the events of the past thirty-six hours. And after each piercing recollection he said, "Well—well"—in the same tone.

He was aroused from those thoughts by a movement of one of the shutters. A slat had been opened and Fawnie's voice came through. He could see the glint of her eyes in the aperture. "Say, darling, can I come in?"

"No."

"Well, look here, Durek, can I tell you why I run away?"

"It was because you loved Jammery, I suppose."

"No. It was because I loved you. Jammery told me if I didn't he'd run a knife through your back in the lane some night, and I knew he would. You didn't know Jammery, darling. He was wicked. He'd done it before. Killed a man. And I didn't want you stabbed in the dark. So I went. Every word of this is true, Durek. As I went my tears splashed on the ground and I was sayin' all the while to myself—'poor Durek—poor baby!' And I sent Lottie Rain, and every night I cried in my sleep, and Jammery got to hate me and said he wished he'd never seen my face."

"Where is he now?"

"He's dead. I had to stay till he died. There was no one else to take care of him. He was sick even when he was here. With the consumption, you know. He got worse pretty soon. He'd think his pillow was you, Durek, and he'd kneel up in the bed and stab it with a pretend knife, and he couldn't kill it, so he died."

Derek made no comment, and, after a space of silence, she faltered, "Durek, may I open the shutter so's you can see how thin and tired I am?"

"If you wish."

She fumbled with the fastening, then the shutter swung open and revealed her as in a frame. She was indeed thin. Her cheeks had lost their childlike roundness, her breast was flat, her eyes beneath their pencilled brows looked very large and bright.

"May I come in and rest a little while, Durek," she asked, plaintively. "My poor little feet is blistered."

"Yes," he said, shortly. "You may go up to your old room. Go around by the front door."

"Will I close the shutter?"

"No. Leave it open."

Meekly she turned away. He heard the soft brush of

her feet on the grass, the timid shuffle of them on the stair, the pad of them in the room above his head. . . .

Through the open window he looked across the lawn, across the strawberry beds, across the stream, to the shore meadow where the young bull, son of Gretta van Lowe, had been turned out for exercise. He had had his fill of running, of snorting, of charging the wind, and now stood in statuesque unconcern staring insolently at the gentle ewes that grazed on the bank of the stream.

A great love for Grimstone surged over Derek. Grimstone and he were one. His own flesh that morning had become one with the soil. He could never leave it now. And there upstairs was Fawnie, little, weak, something to be cared for, protected, his own—after all. What a strange thing possession was! You thought you were the possessor when, in truth you were the thing possessed.

He rose, and slowly went upstairs.

Fawnie was lying on her bed, her loosened hair tumbled on the pillow. Her eyes were wet, and tears ran unheeded down her cheeks.

"Why are you crying?" asked Derek from the doorway.

"Not for that poor little baby—not for Buckskin," she sobbed, "but for you, darling, because you suffer, and—as a matter of fac', I don' know how to comfort you."

He came to her and sat down on the side of the bed.

She clutched his hand and pressed it to her breast.

"Oh, believe me, Durek, believe me! I'll be as true—as true as one of those strong trees out there—the one with the iron ring grown into its side." She drew their clasped hands to her lips and kissed her wedding ring. "Every word of what I told you is true," she said with passion.

He did not answer, but looked down soberly into her eyes.

From her appealing face his gaze moved to the window. On the bluff before the house he saw the figures of Grace

and her father surrounded by their dogs. They, too, became conscious of him. With a military gesture Mr. Jerrold raised his hand to his cap, and Grace looked and smiled a little, and looked again as though she could not keep her wistful eyes from the window.

But she knew nothing of what had happened.

Derek turned to Fawnie. He put his arms about her, and laid his face beside hers on the pillow.

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